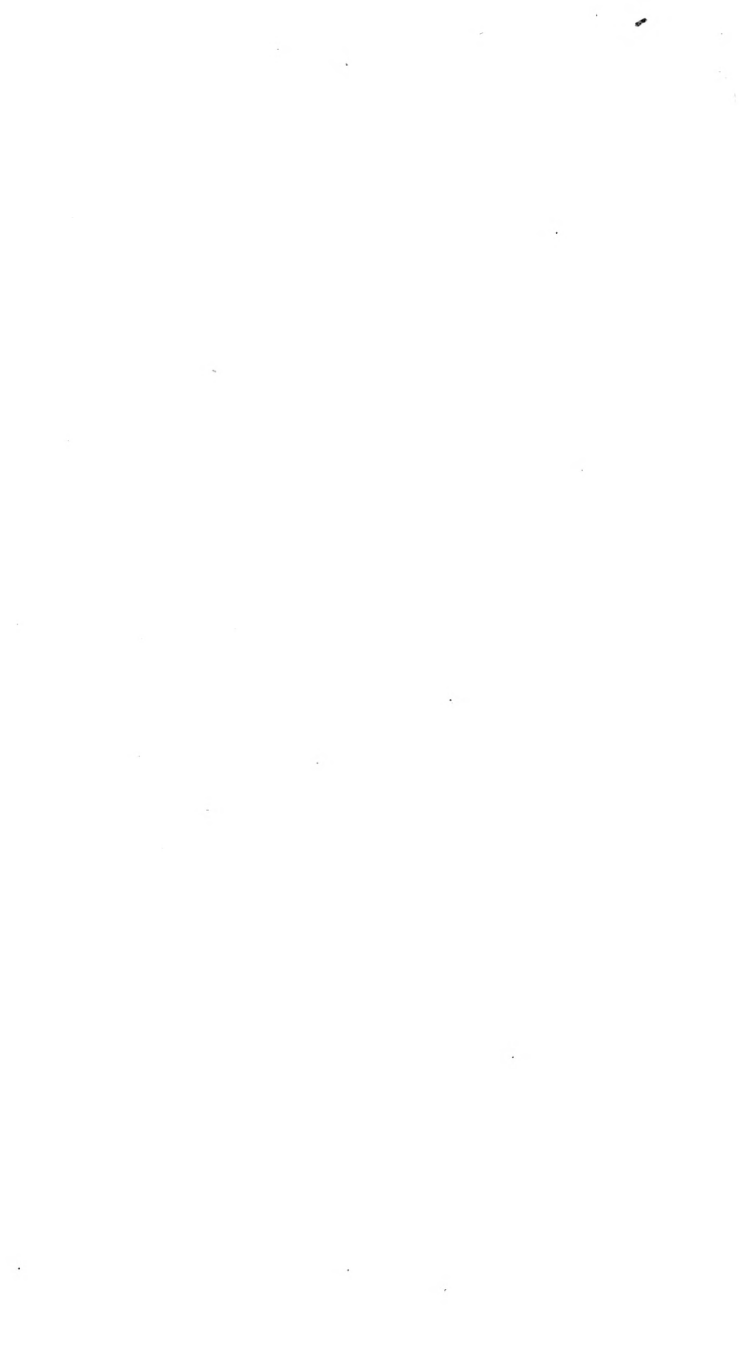


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THE GILBERTS & THEIR GUESTS.

A STORY OF HOMELY ENGLISH LIFE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY JULIA DAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ENGAGEMENT."

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THE GILBERTS & THEIR GUESTS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was no piano in Miss Dale's little drawing room, but Fanny Gilbert possessed the enviable accomplishment of being able to sing without an accompaniment; and now as Mr. Surrey, holding Rhoda by the hand, stood at the doorway, unobserved in the deepening twilight, he paused, well pleased to listen, while she melodiously sang—

Oh ! for a home serenely still,
Where the vexed heart might find a balm,
Where not a sound but bird or rill,
Or trembling leaf should break the calm !

Where we might see deep shadows glide,
Or through the boughs light glancing play,
Where we might watch at eventide
The sunset glory fade away.

To soothe the troubled spirit's pain,
To bring back long forgotten joys,
The pomps of cities are in vain,
With all their gaudy, glittering toys.

Oh! for a home serenely still,
Where the vexed heart might find a balm,
Where not a sound but bird or rill,
Or trembling leaf should break the calm.

A hush followed the plaintive melody, its most appropriate tribute of praise: but in a few minutes the murmur of applause burst forth, under cover of which, Rhoda, who had now slipped into the room, stole to the side of Miss Dale, and whispered a few words in her ear. There was scarcely light enough to distinguish clearly who was the new guest that a moment afterwards approached her unannounced, but if the evening shade had been deeper still, Miss Dale could not have mistaken the cordial hand that now sought hers.

“You are a welcome visitor,” she said.

“I returned not an hour ago, and finding my friends were here, I thought I could not do better than follow them.”

There was an exclamation of surprise.

“It is Mr. Surrey!”

And presently the whole Gilbert party were cordially greeting him.

“But there is no seeing you; we are all in the dark,” said Mr. Gilbert.

Just then, however, Dinah appeared bearing lights, and the more lively amusements of the evening were resumed. Some dramatic games were introduced, very much to the delight of the younger portion of the company, and, indeed, affording some degree of entertainment to all. In one of these games Mrs. Duckenfield had to take a prominent part, and Mr. Surrey was struck by the good-natured vivacity with which she surmounted the difficulties of a somewhat perplexing task assigned her, and was himself incited by it to enter into the humour of the hour, and to throw a degree of spirit into his own performance, which made it, in fact, slight as the foundation was, a triumph of art, and elicited from the majority of the little audience tokens of lively applause.

“What do you think of that now?” said Andrew, exultingly, to Miss Charlotte Harris, whose former admiration of Mr. Surrey had latterly been transformed into pique at his obvious indifference to her; “what do you think of that now? I should like to know whether you ever saw better acting anywhere?”

“I confess it was not quite to my taste,” she answered; “it was not like acting at all; it was just like reality.”

Andrew, who had lately aspired to be an admirer of the pretty sentimental Miss Harris, was silenced by her reply, and ventured not one word more in praise of the impromptu performers.

Rhoda came smiling towards him.

“Ask Charlotte to sing,” she whispered.

“I can’t,” said Andrew.

At this moment Mr. Sandham, who, during great part of the evening had been in close attendance on Fanny Gilbert, came forward and preferred a request that Miss Charlotte Harris would take part in a duet with that young lady.

After some feigned reluctance her compliance was granted, and she allowed Mr. Sandham to conduct her to the further end of the room, where Fanny was seated, and at that moment in conversation with Mr. Surrey with no very amiable expression of countenance. But Mr. Sandham observed only the regularity of her features and the extreme delicacy of her complexion; he began to think that she excelled her sister Emily in beauty, and certainly she was more companionable; she entered with far greater interest into his favourite topic of conversation, the beautifying of the small country church of which he had lately been appointed the incumbent.

Mr. Surrey resigned his place to Miss Harris, and after some little consultation on the choice of a duet, the two girls sang in very charming concord an old but always favourite air, one of Moore's incomparable melodies. Another and another followed, and so complete was the harmony, that the absence of instrumental music could not be regretted.

"It is perfect as it is," said Mr. Surrey.

“Bravo, youngladies, bravo,” cried Mr. Gilbert, heartily, at the conclusion of the last duet, and

“Bravo! bravo!” echoed others of the guests.

“Thank you, sweet birds?” said Miss Dale, softly.

The girls smiled.

“The birds must be taking wing now, I think,” observed Mrs. Gilbert; “it is growing late.”

“But not late enough, for the moon is not yet rising,” said Miss Dale.

“And the strawberry feast is not yet half over,” cried Rhoda, as Dinah now rolled into the room a long table laden with the rosy fruit and other light refreshments.

“What a feast!” exclaimed Mr. Surrey.

“And the young lady in whose honour it is held, is fortunate enough to be a wonderful pet of yours, I understand,” said Mrs. Duckenfield, seating herself in the chair which Mr. Surrey placed for her at the table, and pouring on him the full light of her resplendent eyes.

“Is there room for me here? Do you think

I may venture to take a seat beside you?" he enquired.

"Oh, pray do! And lose no time, I beseech you, for I see an approach being made this way," and she glanced towards Mr. Sandham, who was advancing to the table, "a stupid neighbour for a half hour like this would be intolerable."

"I avail myself of your permission," said Mr. Surrey, placing himself beside her, "but I fear it will be no guarantee against the infliction you deprecate."

She did not contradict him in words, but her lips wore a meaning smile, while again her dark eyes beamed on him; and now that she had won him to her side, manifestly bent on charming, and no less manifestly ready to be herself charmed, she kept up an unceasing claim on his attention.

Mr. Surrey fell into the vein of gallantry that seemed called for, all the more readily, perhaps, that it served to conceal feelings which had that evening usurped over him a painful influence. Once during the course of his flirtation, for flirtation it unquestionably was into which his fair

neighbour had succeed in drawing him, he perceived Miss Dale's eye furtively, and as he fancied, reproachfully regarding him. The look was quickly withdrawn, but not before it had called into his countenance an expression of angry annoyance. Now and then he caught the glance of Emily, who chanced to be sitting opposite, but it was simply of merriment; there was no latent feeling behind the arch expression that gave new beauty, he thought, to her countenance; she was obviously an observer, but a thoroughly good-humoured one, and apparently well pleased at the amusement that had fallen in his way. But Mr. Gilbert seemed to be of opinion that his fair cousin was making herself a little too conspicuous, and approaching, asked if room could be made for him, and presently Mrs. Duckenfield found the substantial shoulders of the good lawyer interposed between her interesting new acquaintance and the richly braceleted arm of creamy whiteness, which she had flattered herself attracted his admiring observation. While Surrey, not sorry to be released from the gallantry

which had been extorted from him, rose, and went towards a half-open window, which he threw higher up. Presently he was leaning out of it, inhaling the cool night wind, and contemplating the newly-risen moon. A soft little hand slid within his own; he clasped it closely, but continued his silent contemplation, and Rhoda's eyes, following the direction of his, watched the slow, silvering of a fleecy cloud.

But soon there was a general move, the guests began to depart; and Rhoda, hearing herself called as the adieux were being made, stole away from the window. The Gilbert party however were not just yet going; they lingered after the rest of the company for a little friendly chat with their hostess and to see her latest picture. Rhoda was exultingly assisting in holding it up to view, when on her slight outstretched arm, Fanny suddenly perceived the glitter of a bracelet.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to Mr. Surrey's gift, "look at Rhoda's new finery!"

"Oh how pretty!" exclaimed Emily, "but it

can hardly be called finery, I think, it is so chaste and elegant."

"It is a costly trinket," said Mrs. Gilbert, approaching and examining it more closely; "it has an emerald clasp."

All eyes were turned from the picture, and Rhoda was requested to take off the bracelet that it might be more minutely inspected.

"But who is the donor?" enquired Mr. Gilbert, holding it to the light and looking on it admiringly; "who is the donor? Ah, Sophy! I suspect this is a piece of your extravagance."

"No, indeed, I have never seen the bracelet till now."

"I must make another guess then."

"Ah!" said Miss Dale, "you need not look suspiciously towards me."

"But why should there be all this mystery about it? Why are we not to know at once where it came from?" asked Fanny.

"I found it in the garden," said Rhoda.

“I dare say!” exclaimed Andrew.

“‘How does my lady’s garden grow?
With cockle shells,
And silver bells,
And pretty maids all of a row,’”

sang Mr. Gilbert.

“With these flickering moonbeams you may see there now more fantastic shapes than your song tells of,” said Mr. Surrey, emerging from the shade of the window-curtain.

“Why, William, we had lost you! Where have you been hiding yourself?” cried Mrs. Gilbert.

“Nowhere. I have simply been standing at the window, looking out on the beautiful night.”

“And throwing down jewels for little girls to pick up. You are really incorrigible! You are not to be cured of your too lavish generosity,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

“Oh, what a delightful fault!” exclaimed Mrs. Duckenfield.

“But I assure you it is one of which I am wrongfully accused,” said Mr. Surrey.

“Nay, here is a witness against you,” cried

Mr. Gilbert, drawing forward his little daughter, "see what sparkles on this small wrist!"

"A glow-worm, perhaps, Rhoda has been with the fairies to-night, I suspect."

Emily laughed.

"What a fanciful turn you can give to any charge that is brought against you, Mr. Surrey," she said, "I very often admire this ingenuity of yours."

"And I admire straightforward sincerity," said Fanny.

"Oh, my dear, sincerity is sometimes the most odious thing in the world," cried Mrs. Duckenfield.

"And there are waving lines where the beauty of truth may not unfrequently be found to lie," quietly remarked Mr. Surrey.

"What a charming idea!" exclaimed Mrs. Duckenfield.

"A little too poetical for me, I confess," said Mr. Gilbert.

"My dear, good cousin, you are too matter-of-fact by half, it is your only fault!"

“And my dear, sweet Sophy Duckenfield, if you were not a little too imaginative, you would be faultless.”

“Which for all the world I would not be! I do think a woman who is a piece of perfection is the most disagreeable thing in creation. Now, Mr. Surrey, don’t you agree with me?”

“I have had no opportunity of forming an opinion on the subject.”

“Ah, your turn is to come! you will be finding a perfect angel one of these days,” cried Mr. Gilbert.

“Wings and all, papa?” exclaimed Rhoda.

Everybody laughed, and Rhoda laughed so long that she could scarcely recover herself. Emily looked anxiously at her young sister, and Mr. Surrey, watching her eyes, saw that they filled with tears. He went and leaned over the back of her chair.

“You must not let your sisterly love exaggerate what little cause there may be for anxiety,” he said in a low voice; “the caution you received was not, I am sure, intended to have such an effect as this.”

She turned and looked at him gratefully; she could not speak.

“But it will be well, I think, for the excitement of this evening to be over as speedily as possible; and surely it is growing late. I will give a hint to your mamma that we are getting deep into the night. I fancy she is not at all aware of the hour it really is.” Mr. Surrey crossed the room and began chatting with Mrs. Gilbert.

Presently she started up: “My dear girls, I had no idea it was so late,” she cried; “we shall have to answer for Miss Dale’s being sadly fatigued to-morrow, I fear.”

“Pray don’t let any apprehension of that kind hasten you away. My night seldom begins till long after this time,” said Miss Dale.

“Ah,” said Mr. Surrey, “we know how in this respect you trifle with your health; nevertheless, we must not be accessories to any of the mischief which you so pertinaciously inflict on yourself. On your own shoulders all the blame must lie.”

“You are severe, as usual.”

“Now do not misconstrue my words, which I must observe you not unfrequently do.”

“For which reason perhaps, when you wish to inflict summary punishment you sometimes make use of *looks* that cannot be misconstrued.”

“I know to what you now allude, and I am heartily penitent. Can you forgive me?”

They were standing a little apart from the rest of the company, who were preparing for departure, and Mr. Surrey, as he entreated for pardon, held out his hand.

“Can you forgive me?” he repeated.

“Freely,” and for a moment Miss Dale’s hand was allowed to be closely clasped in his, while a faint colour displaced the pallor which during the evening had stolen over her cheeks. Presently withdrawing her hand, and turning away, she met Fanny’s glance furtively and suspiciously directed towards her, and she was annoyed to feel that the tinge on her cheeks deepened. “I should have out-lived this sort of emotion,” she thought. “Oh! when shall I be shielded by the apathy of age?”

But her last guests were now departing, and she was called on to answer their adieus. Rhoda indeed beguiled her as far as the garden, where, without the protection of a shawl she incautiously lingered, addressing some parting words to her little favourite, when presently a warm covering fell on her shoulders, and a well-known voice said softly, "We must throw a mantle over the wings."

"Ah!" cried Rhoda, "he means that you are an angel!"

CHAPTER II.

“OH, pray have mercy and walk at a slower rate,” cried Mrs. Duckenfield to Mr. Gilbert, who was escorting her homewards, “you forget that my Indian habits have spoiled me for your rapid English pace.”

“But it is getting chilly, Sophy; and to say the truth I am half afraid of a fit of rheumatism unless I keep up a good brisk pace; so I think I shall presently deliver you over to the charge of our friend in the rear, who is better suited than I am for a loitering moonlight stroll. I hear his voice, and my little Rhoda’s not far off, they will be overtaking us soon.”

“Oh! do wait a moment, I have dropped the brooch that fastened my shawl, and I would not lose it for the world.”

“Did it fall here, do you think?” said Mr. Gilbert, stooping, and good-naturedly groping in the dusty road. “But here comes a galloping horseman: we must step aside a moment. Halloo, Doctor! Don’t ride over us.”

Dr. Bassett pulled up his horse. “A word with you, Gilbert,” he said, “I want a carriage of some sort sent instantly to the Briars—to Miss Dale’s. You will pass the ‘George’ on your way home, order one there, if you please, to be sent with all possible despatch. You may as well stop and see it off yourself.”

“To be sure I will. But what’s the matter?”

“I am going to carry off Miss Dale to a patient of mine,” and Dr. Bassett rode on at a rapid pace.

“I must get forward as fast as I can, you see,” said Mr. Gilbert to Surrey, who, by this time had come up, and was standing a little apart in conversation with Mrs. Duckenfield, “so I leave

you to take care of the lady and to find her lost treasure."

"He has found it already," said Mrs. Duckenfield, "see here it is. Only think! It lay close at my feet all the time, though you managed to overlook it."

"Ah, he has younger eyes than I have," said Mr. Gilbert hastening onward.

"Papa, papa, I am going with you," cried Rhoda, flying after him.

Mrs. Duckenfield and Mr. Surrey were left alone, for the rest of the party were far in advance, and the lady seemed to have no intention of endeavouring to overtake them; she strolled very slowly along the moonlit way, with Surrey silently walking beside her.

"How chilly it is!" she exclaimed presently, "and there is something wrong with this tiresome brooch, I cannot keep my shawl fastened with it."

Mr. Surrey proffered his assistance, and presently succeeded in securely closing the soft folds round the lady's fair throat; and then remark-

ing on her apparent susceptibility to cold he advised a more rapid pace, at the same time offering his arm.

“But I cannot walk fast,” said Mrs. Duckenfield, gently leaning on it; “you must have patience with me.”

“Oh, if you have no fear of being chilled, the slower we walk the better on such a night as this. How the glimmering moonbeams play on the trembling leaves of these wayside trees! With every new breath of air they seem to be bathed afresh in a shower of silvery light.”

“Yes, it really is an enchanting scene, and it is quite delightful to enjoy it with a congenial companion.”

Mr. Surrey smiled.

“It is so pensive—it inspires such tender thoughts,” continued the lady.

Still her companion remained silent.

“I do so love moonlight,” pursued Mrs. Duckenfield.

“In a tropical climate you must have enjoyed it in perfection,” said Surrey.

“Ah, yes, but there were many drawbacks then to my delight in it; I am happier now.”

“You enjoy without doubt a return to your own country and restoration to your old friends. And this fair moonlight may call up in your mind very interesting associations—very agreeable memories.”

“May I not love it for the sake of the present?” said Mrs. Duckenfield, leaning more impressively on her companion’s arm.

“Which is gone even as you utter it,” said Surrey.

“O, don’t make me melancholy! I would have it last for ever.”

“What a pretty feminine aspiration!”

“It was the heart that spoke,” said Mrs. Duckenfield in her blindest tone, and laying her hand softly on Surrey’s arm. If he responded with a gentle pressure of that fair hand, it was no more, he thought, than common gallantry demanded.

“How delightful it is to meet with sympathy

—to feel drawn towards another by an invisible cord,” murmured the lady.

Mr. Surrey somewhat quickened his steps, and began to discourse on the beauty of the silvery clouds that were floating above them; but Mrs. Duckenfield’s steps flagged, and her arm rested more heavily on his; he was obliged to resume the loitering pace at which they had before proceeded, and to talk of other matters than clouds, for *à propos* of their borrowed radiance, his companion contrived somehow or other to introduce the topic of love, and presently he found himself conversing with her on the possibility of the heart being surprised into a sudden passion.

“A tone—a glance may call into life an affection that we feel can never die. Is it not so?” said she, and her dark eyes were bent on him eloquently.

“Possibly,” answered Surrey, “where there is no guard set on the feelings; where through the dictates of wisdom the heart has not resigned itself to an impassive state.”

“How cold must be the nature that could so submit itself!” cried the lady.

"The dormant fire may lurk there still," said Surrey. "But you are fatigued, I fear," he presently remarked, becoming more conscious of the pressure of the arm that was linked within his own, "this walk is too much for you." Mrs. Duckenfield, however, declared that she found it delightful; and proceeding to descant on her predilection for the country, the characteristics of the surrounding scenery fell under discussion.

"Its beauties are by no means striking," said Surrey, "but wherever there are green fields and trees, and an open sky, there is enough to foster our love of nature; and these, and nothing beyond these, are to be found here." Such simple charms, the lady observed, were quite to her taste, and during her sojourn at Woodridge she intended enjoying them to the utmost. Presently Surrey found himself being enlisted as her companion in some projected rambles. "It will be well to encourage your walking powers, without doubt," he said, "and by way of putting you in good training I should recommend

now a little—a very little quicker pace to you.” But Mrs. Duckenfield assured him that she was already exerting herself to the full extent of her ability, and the languor of her steps certainly rather increased than diminished. Surrey now finding himself somewhat at a loss for a new subject made no attempt to continue the conversation; but he was not long allowed to indulge in taciturnity.

“How grave you are!” exclaimed the lady, at the expiration of a few moments.

“A polite way of reminding me that I am intolerably dull,” said he, “but you must pardon me. my long habit of solitude often leads me to fall into silence.”

“Oh, how can you bear anything so dismal as solitude? I have a perfect horror of it.”

“And to me it breathes of balm,” said Surrey.

“In congenial companionship. balm sweetest of all is to be found, as *I* think,” observed his companion.

“How difficult to meet with it!” he answered.

But the woods and fields are ready always to let our mood be theirs—to wear a cheerful or a pensive aspect as our humour may be. I perceive however that your nature is a social one—we must all follow the bent of our own minds.—For me, I am ready to go into the wilderness alone.”

“I shall begin to think that you are an untamed savage, I must take you in hand to civilize you.”

“That would be too delightful a result of my barbarianism. I could not inflict on you so hard and so hopeless a task.”

“But I am determined to attempt it. I don’t despair of you at all—and to begin—I shall seat myself here, on this felled tree, and you are to place yourself beside me.”

“I am all obedience; but it is very cold,” said Surrey, giving a mock shiver, and seating himself as the lady had directed, half amused at what he considered her playfulness; but on this humour of hers giving place to a dangerously sentimental mood, he became somewhat impatient of his position. Availing himself of the first op-

portunity which a pause in the conversation afforded, he presently abruptly started up, sportively exclaiming, that he should be transformed into something more terrible even than the savage which the lady had declared him to be—that he should become an iceberg if he remained longer stationary in the cold moonlight, and forthwith he began vigorously swinging his arms. He uttered a shout of laughter as he concluded his gymnastic exercise, but Mrs. Duckenfield did not echo the cheerful peal, she sat silent and apparently in grave displeasure. Anxious to conciliate, he approached her.

“Savage as I am, I cannot allow you to remain here, incurring the risk of taking a severe cold,” said he. “It is really unwise to be lingering in this chilly night air. If you persist in being so romantic as to sit here gazing on the moon you will be ill to morrow, I know you will, shut up in your room, and I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you. Come, let me persuade you into having a little more care for your health, and hastening home as quickly as possible.”

“How afraid you are of taking cold!” she answered, in a tone of pique. “What caution you possess!”

“It is a characteristic of mine: I have an immense bump of it here,” said he, playfully tapping his forehead.

“Oh! are you a believer in phrenology?”

“To be sure; I am a believer in all things.”

“No; there is one thing, at least, in which you do not believe.”

“What is that, pray?”

“I shall not tell you.”

“Well, I must submit to the rigour of your determination. But you are absolutely shivering; a little rapid exercise will be the best thing to give you warmth. Let me advise you to step briskly forward,” and he offered his hand to assist her to rise.

She put her hand in his, but did not move from her place.

“Come,” he said, attempting, with a little gentle force, to induce her to leave her seat.

“Come.”

There was a sound of advancing footsteps, and Surrey would gladly have withdrawn his hand, but it was not relinquished, and at this awkward moment, Emily Gilbert and her brother Andrew emerged from a dark angle of the road into the broad moonlight, and came suddenly before them.

Emily looked embarrassed, and in a grave manner, unusual to her, explained that they had come back in search of Mrs. Duckenfield; while Andrew found it impossible to control a burst of boyish laughter.

Surrey's annoyance was excessive: impatiently disengaging his hand, and muttering by way of apology that his escort was no longer needed, he left the lady to proceed when she chose, and hastily walked onwards.

CHAPTER III.

THE next morning when Surrey joined the breakfast party there was no Emily; she had already set off, he was told, the friends whom she was accompanying on their visit to the seaside having commenced their journey at a very early hour. She had intended, Mrs. Gilbert said, bidding him good-bye on the previous evening, but on her return home with Mrs. Duckenfield found that he had already retired for the night, and so had been able merely to leave a message of friendly adieu for him. Surrey's first thought was that Emily might at least herself have conveyed to him her farewell through the medium of a note; a few

parting words penned by her own hand, coming straight from the heart, would, he felt, have better marked her consideration for him; but he remembered their untoward rencontre the evening before, and could scarcely be surprised by her withholding from him, at the present moment, any such mark of her friendly regard, for how contemptible must he appear in her eyes. Though she had not responded to his affection—though her heart was pre-occupied—yet she had bestowed on him her cordial friendship, had even betrayed a grateful pride in his preference; but how worthless must that preference now appear, when it seemed to have been transferred to another at the bidding of a few tender whispers, a few undisciplined glances. And to Emily, who with her warm frank nature was yet all delicacy and purity, and by no means devoid of a certain womanly reserve in matters of the heart, how repugnant must be the sort of attractions which had seemingly captivated him. Full of reflections like these, he was little disposed to fall into the vein of gallantry which

it was obvious that Mrs. Duckenfield was prepared for; he had some difficulty, indeed, to endure with a shew of ordinary complacency her undisguised favour. If his vanity was in some measure flattered by it, on the other hand he was painfully sensitive to the observation, not unmingled with ridicule, to which it subjected him in the quiet home circle, where hitherto he had been regarded with a partiality not unmingled with respect.

On the conclusion of breakfast Surrey would gladly have escaped into solitude, but this he found to be impossible: Mrs. Duckenfield was bent on penetrating into the little *sanctum* which had been appropriated to his use as a study, and that during his absence had been kept scrupulously locked; it was the only room in the house which she had not re-visited, she said; and, moreover, it was one full of pleasureable associations; she had spent such happy time in it when her favourite Edmund was amongst them. It was there, while she was embroidering the ottoman, which she was

pleased to hear Mr. Surrey had admired, that the dear boy, escaping from the dull office, used so often to come and sit at her feet, reading to her some charming novel. She really must write to him from that very room, she was persuaded it would make her letter doubly welcome; did not Mrs. Gilbert think so? Mrs. Gilbert sighed: she attributed Edmund's first disinclination to the routine of his father's office to the influence of Mrs. Duckenfield. He had only just left school, and docilely enough was beginning his study of the law, when she came on a visit to them. Her insatiable love of admiration would not allow her to let even a mere boy escape being subjugated by her attraction, and many a little art was brought into play in order to win his attention. She had also genuine pleasure in his society; the handsome vivacious youth was a more agreeable companion to her than the invalid veteran to whom she had rashly united herself. Edmund, without dreaming of wrong, became captivated by her smiles, and was for ever stealing to her

side; his diligence in the office was at an end; and he began to manifest dislike of the profession that had been selected for him. Any other course of study would probably, however, at this time have proved equally distasteful to him; enchanted and bewildered by the favour he had won, his feelings were in a tumult that rendered impossible his sober attention to any grave pursuit. Fortunately Mrs. Duckenfield's visit was not of long duration, but brief as it was, it left with Edmund unfavourable results; the steady habit of application with which he had resolved to pursue his professional education had been broken, and too early in life he had gained an experience which he would have been far better without. From this time forward, indeed, he became volatile in his pursuits, and careless in his attachments.

Mr. Gilbert, who had no suspicion of the origin of his son's unsettled habits, was, perhaps, too harsh in his condemnation of them. The proud and gay spirit of the youth revolted against restrictions attempted to be put on his actions,

and in his impatience to escape from parental bondage he fell into the society of evil companions whose extravagances and excesses he soon but too readily imitated. When at length, however, the full extent of the injury to his family, which his reckless conduct had occasioned, became manifest to him, the young man's heart smote him, and he had gone into exile with the firm resolution of persevering in a diligent career, and repairing as far as possible the mischief he had caused.

Mrs. Duckenfield, since she parted from him, had scarcely thought of the young relative whose boyish admiration she had so injudiciously encouraged, till on this, her second visit to the Gilberts, a sufficiently pleasurable recollection of him was awakened, to make her regret that he was no longer of the family circle. But now all other feeling gave place to the sudden impression which Surrey had made on her heart, and instead of endeavouring to disguise this, she was every instant betraying it. The generality of lookers-on might reasonably enough suspect the

genuineness of an affection thus rapidly developed, but Surrey knew enough of the varieties of human nature to be aware that, although it gave proof of a lamentable want of prudence, it evinced no lack of sincerity; and in the midst of the annoyance it occasioned him, he was conscious of a better feeling than mere satisfied vanity, as the warm incense of her admiration excited a sense of gratitude, and brought something of heat to his chilled heart. The blank occasioned by the absence of Emily would certainly have been more severely felt, but for the presence of Mrs. Duckenfield, who day by day became more assiduous in her endeavour to win him as a lover. Wherever he might be, she was almost constantly beside him. In his quiet study, which the Gilberts scrupulously refrained from entering uninvited, she unhesitatingly established herself every morning with her embroidery frame or her writing-desk. His walks ceased to be solitary; strolling through the green lanes, or pacing the breezy common she hung on his arm: and in the little household party which the evening assembled in the drawing-room, she invari-

ably manœuvred that the place next her corner of the sofa should be his. In a little while he began to feel the softening influence of this propinquity, and almost unconsciously to himself a tenderness stole into his manner, that not only fed the hopes of his fair pursuer, but led the Gilbert family to suspect that he responded to her affection, and many little incidents strengthened their suspicion. Andrew had made no secret of the lover-like manner in which it appeared that Mrs. Duckenfield and Surrey were enjoying the moonlight when they were surprised by Emily and himself: and Fanny, one day going suddenly into the drawing-room where they were alone together, had as rapidly retreated on perceiving the lady's hand clasped in that of her companion. On another occasion Mrs. Gilbert had certainly witnessed a harmless endearment pass between them when they were not aware of her presence. Rhoda held her peace, but innocently approaching the study window with her daily offering of freshly gathered flowers, she had often and often seen a white hand resting on the scholar's shoulder as he bent over his manuscript.

But although Surrey endured and even sometimes returned the tenderness thus lavished on him, for he was no ascetic—no stoic—he was as far as ever from any intention of asking the lady to be his companion for life: he was wrong perhaps, without such an intention, to continue in her society, but his conduct did not strike himself in this light. They had been accidentally thrown together, and it would be almost absurd in him, he thought, to fly from his temporary home, because a fair lady had invaded its precincts, and lavished upon him her favor. He would stand his ground manfully at all events—as to the rest, events must take their course. He could not absolutely repulse the lady's advances, who still young and lively, with a fair share of beauty, had attractions sufficient to strike his fancy, though they could not reach his heart. He was soon in a predicament of some danger. Mrs. Duckenfield, observing the increase of her influence over him, redoubled her fascinations; to resist them wholly was impossible, and without compromising his honor it would be difficult to escape from the entanglement of a tie, which in

this instance he was resolved not to fetter himself with. No justification could be offered for the course which he pursued; it was altogether beneath him, but the flattery of woman's favor lulled his reason, and made him fail to perceive, that it was ungenerous to accept the love which he could not in full measure return: so he lingered on from day to day, from week to week, in the society that he should have forbidden himself to indulge in, inhaling incense that intoxicated his senses.

But all this while he was slowly sinking in the partial estimation of the Gilberts; a shade of displeasure crept into their manner towards him; even little Rhoda approached him with some restraint; and by degrees he and Mrs. Duckenfield became almost isolated in the family party. Emily, who continued absent, either ceased to send friendly messages to him, or they were not conveyed if she did send them. It became obvious beyond all doubt that the character of the intimacy between the visitors was disapproved by those whose guests they were; there was a freedom in it at variance with the

good old-fashioned English decorum hitherto not transgressed by any one of that little household.

“Well, in one way or other the penalty of folly must be paid.”

So thought Surrey as his eyes began to open to the disadvantageous light in which he had placed himself, where least he could have wished so to stand. And how should he escape from the perplexity of his position in regard to Mrs. Duckenfield herself? She manifestly was expecting a proposal of marriage from him. Had she a right to do so? He conscientiously deliberated on this question, and after mature consideration decided that she had *not*. She had been his pursuer, and had succeeded in winning from him certain gallantries, but he had made no profession of love to her; on the contrary, from time to time he had given her to understand that he had no affection to bestow; that his heart was dead to the warm emotion that could alone respond to feelings like hers; that he sought no social ties; that he would lead the life of a monk—an anchorite—would fly all female attraction. But he did not fly, as the

lady perceived, and so she only laughed or wept over his cynical protestations, as her mood might be. Notwithstanding the many flattering proofs of favor, Surrey was not much elated with his conquest. Mrs. Duckenfield would, he believed, have yielded her heart to any one who had chanced to come in her way, inclined to accept the gift; if it was a treasure, it was one she could not keep; and he felt persuaded that when his departure should take place, however vehemently it might at first be deplored, it would speedily be followed by her electing some one or other as his successor in her favor. He felt, therefore, no great compunction in determining to leave her without giving any promise to return, and presently decided that the sooner he carried his intention into effect the better it would be. Seriously, indeed, he now deplored the weakness that had led him to remain so long. It would have been well enough, he thought, to have extended his visit for the period of a week or two after his acquaintance with Mrs. Duckenfield had commenced; then nothing but an idle jest could have been raised at his expense, but

now it was apparent that he had lost the good opinion of the Gilberts; many little circumstances made this obvious to him, but the crowning proof of their displeasure was the withdrawal of Rhoda from his society; she had been forbidden to enter his study, or to accompany him on his walks. His fond affection for his little favorite made this prohibition a mortifying and bitter privation to him; and of late he had been watching her health with some anxiety, and had planned for her many little amusements to take the place of the studies which Doctor Bassett had pronounced it dangerous for her to pursue. Very gladly, too, he would often have enlisted her as one of the companions of the long country rambles, during which he not unfrequently felt that the presence of any third person would spare him from considerable embarrassment; but he acknowledged the wisdom of the interdiction, while regretting the imprudence that rendered it advisable.

CHAPTER IV

“LET us call on Miss Dale,” said Mr. Surrey, as one morning, accompanied as usual, he was taking his customary country walk, and he turned into the green lane leading to the Briars.

But Mrs. Duckenfield remonstrated. “It will be far pleasanter to go and sit under our favourite tree by the river-side,” she said.

“The clouds threaten rain; and beside, I want to pay this visit,” he answered.

“I do believe you are always wanting to visit Miss Dale.”

“I must practise considerable self-denial then, for certainly during the last few weeks I have very seldom visited her.”

“Ah! but, cruel man, you are now regretting it.”

Mr. Surrey was silent.

“You are not like yourself to-day. How have I offended you?”

“You are fanciful, fair lady, I am not offended.”

“Then something has grieved you. Tell me what it is! You ought to have no sorrow without letting me partake of it. When I was in anxiety about my dear absent child—my darling boy—did not I fly for sympathy to you?”

“I am very glad that you have no further cause for uneasiness about him; the last accounts you received were certainly most satisfactory.”

“Sweet treasure! Yes. Oh how I shall devour him with kisses when we meet! And how you too will love him!”

Surrey made no reply.

“We will have him all to ourselves,” continued the lady.

“You forget my vow of solitude.”

“Oh, you have renounced that long ago,”

she cried, pressing emphatically the arm on which she leaned.

"You are mistaken," he replied. "But see, here we are at the little wicket, and the garden within is absolutely one blush of roses. Look at the profusion in which they grow? I shall gather you a whole handful to carry home presently. I shall begin my depredations at once," he said, somewhat abruptly dropping the lady's arm, as they advanced on the pathway towards the house, and plucking two or three of the roses, "I hope Miss Dale will forgive me."

"She will be jealous," said Mrs. Duckenfield, taking the flowers from his hand, and placing them in her bosom.

"You are under a mistake," answered Surrey gravely.

"No, no, one woman can easily enough read the heart of another. But, poor lady! I think it is time for her to give up such a feeling; she cannot expect to inspire any sentiment beyond friendship now."

"And what nobler one could be desired?"

"It is too cold for me," cried Mrs. Duckenfield.

"And for me it is all sufficient," said Surrey.

"False man!" exclaimed the lady, tearing off a blooming branch from a rose tree, and with a bewitching smile playfully sweeping it across his lips, "false, false man."

He could not refrain from a smile in return, but he said nothing.

The window of Miss Dale's painting room was open, and stepping a little in advance of his companion, Surrey approached it; he put aside a muslin curtain that partially screened the artist:

"Am I too bold?" he said.

As Miss Dale slowly lifted her head from the picture over which it was bent, he saw that her countenance was pale and tearful.

"You are not well," he cried, stretching forward his hand, and grasping the slender fingers that half shrank from his touch. "You are not well."

There was no reply, and for a moment the pallid face was turned aside.

But Mrs. Duckenfield exclaiming, "My dear Miss Dale, we are taking you quite by surprise," was now approaching the window, and with recovered composure and some dignity of manner Miss Dale rose to give her welcome.

"Pray come into the house," she said; "you will find the door open."

"No, no," cried Surrey, "we will not interrupt you, I see you are busy over your painting."

"Not so busy as to deny myself the pleasure of receiving those who are kind enough to visit me."

"Well for five minutes then—"

"Yes, only for five minutes; we can't possibly stay longer, we have not had our walk yet," said Mrs. Duckenfield.

"That is of no consequence, but we must not encroach longer on Miss Dale's time," observed her companion.

"I declare it rains!" she cried, as suddenly a heavy shower came pelting down, and followed by Surrey, she ran into the house.

“Will you admit us here?” he asked, making his way to the painting room.

“You will find my little drawing room in more comfortable order; I will follow you there immediately.”

“Nay don’t banish us there, I want to have a glance at the easel.”

“As you please, but I am a sad litterer, and here you will hardly find unoccupied chairs, I fear.”

“I will obviate that difficulty,” said Surrey, displacing a pile of drawing paper and pulling forward a small settee, “here is room for one at least.”

“Sit you there then, this shall be my place,” cried Mrs. Duckenfield, seating herself at his feet in a picturesque attitude on a low ottoman, and looking up at him languishingly.

A sudden flush passed over Surrey’s countenance, and he glanced hastily towards Miss Dale; he could only catch her profile, for her face was half averted from him as she gathered together her painting materials; but even with this

partial view of her countenance he could detect on it, he thought, an expression of contempt.

Presently Mrs. Duckenfield, gazing up into his face, exclaimed, "You must have your portrait painted, and give it to me—Have you ever had your likeness taken?"

"No, indeed! Fortunately, of my ugly physiognomy there is no copy."

"Ugly! with those beautiful eyes!" she cried. "Hear him, Miss Dale! Would not he make a very good picture?"

"An expressive one perhaps."

"To be sure! just as he is looking at this very moment; come now, let this be his first sitting. I am certain you will make an excellent likeness."

"I am no portrait painter," said Miss Dale, putting aside her palette and brushes.

"Let me see what progress you have made with my favourite landscape," cried Surrey abruptly rising; "why how is this?" he said, stooping to examine an unfinished picture; "you have scarcely added one stroke since I last saw it, I don't know how long ago."

"I do," observed Miss Dale, "it is exactly five weeks."

He looked somewhat embarrassed, but quickly recovering himself, "what is the cause of your having made so little advance then?" he enquired.

"I have been otherwise occupied. I have been seldom at home."

"I ought to have remembered the sad claim on your time. How is your poor friend?"

"As ill as it is possible to be," answered Miss Dale sorrowfully.

"And you are injuring yourself by too close attendance on her, as your appearance attests; you are not looking well, this is not as it should be; you ought not to sacrifice yourself in this manner."

"There are occasions where compassion for others precludes all thought of self."

"I see it is useless for me to offer advice. It always is."

"And it is certainly long since you have found it worth while to have an opportunity of offering it."

Mr. Surrey looked hurt, but he was silent.

"I declare you are quarrelling like a pair of old lovers," cried Mrs. Duckenfield, looking up impatiently from a collection of engravings, that during the last few minutes she had been affecting to examine; "I can't endure to see people at variance, you really must shake hands and be friends, if only for my sake;" and hastily rising she approached Surrey and seizing his reluctant hand, attempted to place it in Miss Dale's, saying, "he is under my orders, and I am a peace-maker, you see."

But Miss Dale drew back with some dignity. "Excuse me," she said, "your intervention is unnecessary; Mr. Surrey and I have been friends too long to make it requisite."

Mrs. Duckenfield tossed her little head, and Mr. Surrey turned again to the picture.

"I cannot enough admire some of the details of this landscape," he said, "they are admirably executed. For instance, the light falling on the fresh foliage of the oak, the almost golden tint the young leaves wear, the shadowy outline

of the distant hill blending with the soft cloud, the peacefulness of the little nook in the valley, where a gleam of sunshine radiantly steals in,—all are exquisitely pourtrayed. They recall to me the very hours in which you sketched them—pleasant hours; to me, at least,” he added. “I cannot bear to think of this picture falling into the hands of strangers—I should like to be able sometimes to look on it.”

“It shall one day be yours,” said Miss Dale.

Mr. Surrey would have thanked her, but he was struck with an unusual melancholy in the tone of her voice; he looked up, but her face was turned away from him, and presently she went to the window, and stood there as if watching the clearing of the sky, for the rain was now abating.

“Oh! what have I done?” cried Mrs. Duckenfield despairingly, as the fringe of a rich shawl she wore, accidentally brushing against a glass vase on a table near which she stood, overturned it, and the water it contained was partially poured over an unfinished picture that unluckily lay there; “oh, what have I done?”

“Indeed, I fear the painting is injured,” said Surrey.

“Oh, Miss Dale, you never can forgive me!” exclaimed the culprit.

Miss Dale did not turn from the window.

“What shall I do? She is too angry to speak,” whispered Mrs. Duckenfield.

“No,” replied Surrey, in the same low tone, “I will answer for it, that is not the case. But we had better try what can be done to repair the damage, or at least to arrest further mischief, and I think with the aid of that beautifully embroidered handkerchief of yours, we shall be able to save one portion of the picture.”

While he was endeavouring carefully to wipe off the water, and Mrs. Duckenfield was anxiously watching him, Miss Dale quietly came and stood behind them.

“You are giving yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble,” she said presently; “that was a condemned picture—one I had determined to destroy.”

And calmly taking it out of his hands she slowly tore it into fragments.

Mrs. Duckenfield appeared distressed.

"Oh, Miss Dale!" she cried, "you don't look angry, but, indeed, I fear you are very very much displeased."

"I assure you my looks are to be trusted," answered Miss Dale, tranquilly smiling.

"That I am certain they are," said Surrey, "therefore I shall be under no further distress about the picture. I shall only rejoice the accident was not here," he added, again standing over the easel.

As he looked up his eyes met hers, and he could not avoid remarking how clouded was the pleasant light they sometimes wore. It was obvious, he thought, that she had wept much of late; indeed, he fancied he could perceive tears even now struggling to come forth. But a gleam of sunshine suddenly appearing, and Mrs. Duckenfield observing that they must take advantage of this improvement in the weather to return home, attracted his attention to herself by calling on him to arrange the folds of the shawl that had partially fallen from her shoulders. She had not yet resumed the bonnet which, soon

after her arrival, she had thrown off, and now, as in negligent attitude she stood near the window, leaning on the arm of a low settee, her head uncovered and her fair full throat partially displayed, with the broad sunlight streaming on her luxuriant raven hair, lighting up her soft dark eyes and giving a warm tint to the ivory whiteness of her complexion, Surrey felt that she possessed personal charms to which it was impossible to be insensible. Perhaps Miss Dale read the thought passing in his mind, for her eyes, following the direction of his, rested on the attractive object of his contemplation. But he was presently attending to the arrangement of the shawl, for which his services had been required. The task, however, was not very speedily accomplished; Mrs. Duckenfield was peremptory as to the folds being gracefully disposed, and Surrey was not a practised cavalier in matters of this sort, but in process of time the lady was duly equipped for her walk.

“Good morning, dear Miss Dale,” she said, now fully restored to her usual good humour.

“I must say good bye,” remarked Surrey;

“to-morrow I take leave of the Gilberts, and quit this part of the country, preparatory to making a long tour on the continent.”

Miss Dale only silently returned the pressure of his hand, but Mrs. Duckenfield uttered a scream of dismay.

“What can you mean?” she cried; “but I know you are only in jest.”

“Indeed, I am in very sad and sober earnest.”

“Then you are a cruel, cruel wretch!” she exclaimed, and sinking on a chair fell into a fit of hysterical weeping.

Miss Dale, notwithstanding that she could feel little sympathy for the passionate agitation of the undisciplined heart that was so recklessly betraying itself, could not altogether withhold her compassion from the suffering which she perceived was genuine, and with true feminine kindness she strove to moderate the distressing paroxysm.

Surrey appeared painfully disturbed and embarrassed; with hurried and unequal steps he paced to and fro the little apartment, now and

then stopping and looking anxiously on Mrs. Duckenfield, but he did not speak. In a little while, through Miss Dale's benevolent ministration, she was restored to a state of comparative composure; she still indeed continued to weep, but her cries ceased, and Surrey now approaching her, she seized his hand and ejaculated some entreaty. Surrey's answer was inaudible to Miss Dale, but must have conveyed consolation, for Mrs. Duckenfield's spirits now quickly rallied, and there was no further impediment to their setting off on their homeward walk.

Miss Dale's guests having once more taken leave of her, the little painting room was restored to its usual tranquillity. But the artist could not resume the labours that had been interrupted, and instead of re-seating herself at the easel she, in an attitude denoting extreme weariness, languidly reclined on a low couch, and closing her eyes might have appeared to slumber but for the deep dejection that her countenance expressed.

CHAPTER V.

THE way home was not a long one, indeed it could easily be traversed in little more than half-an-hour, but Mrs. Duckenfield and Surrey arrived at the Gilberts two hours after their departure from the Briars. As they were approaching the house they perceived the unusual circumstance of a handsome carriage, with servants in attendance, in waiting before it; and as they drew nearer Surrey, to his surprise, recognised the Dalton livery: and presently Janet, the little parlour-maid, hurried forward to announce that there was company in the drawing-room waiting to see him. Dropping the arm of Mrs. Duckenfield, who knowing that the usual dinner hour was near at hand, disappeared in order to

improve her toilet, he at once proceeded there, anticipating, of course, a meeting with his friends from Broadleaze, and on his entrance little Lucy Dalton, breaking from the arms of Rhoda, with whom she had been at play, flew towards him with a shout of joy, attracting the attention of Lady Dalton, who in conversation with Mrs. Gilbert, had been unconscious of his approach; but who now promptly rising and extending her hand, while a flush of pleasure mantled her beautiful countenance, with graceful cordiality, advanced to meet him. "We are going to Italy," she said, "but we could not leave England without bringing our darling to bid you farewell."

Surrey stooped to caress her little daughter, and catching her in his arms, he kissed the fair brow, round which the soft curls clustered.

"Sir James is gone out in search of you," continued Lady Dalton; "for we have a long drive before us, and have been obliged to order the carriage for our return, and it would have been grievous indeed to have gone without seeing you."

“I am very unfortunate in having been absent on your arrival. I hope you have not been here long,” said Surrey.

“Indeed we have, longer than I thought,” said Lady Dalton, looking at her watch, “but Mrs. Gilbert and her daughter have bestowed so pleasant a welcome on us that, had our visit been shorter, we should have missed much enjoyment.”

At this moment Sir James returned, “Ah, Surrey,” he cried; “I am very glad to find you at last,” and leading him aside he strongly urged his accompanying them to Italy. He would take no refusal, and left the proposal he had made to Surrey’s consideration. Then turning to his wife—“My love,” said he, “the horses are becoming impatient and we must be off.” Raising his little one in his arms and holding her towards Surrey that he might receive a parting kiss from her rosy lips, “God bless you, my friend!” he said, and in visible emotion he wrung Surrey’s hand.

Lady Dalton’s adieu very gracefully implied

her sense of lasting gratitude, and when, a few minutes afterwards, Surrey saw them depart, rich in domestic joys, he felt his heart glow with the consciousness that at least one act of his life had been productive of the happiest result.

Returning to the drawing-room, he found Mrs. Gilbert there alone.

"What hospitality!" he cried, glancing at the luncheon tray; "but I fear your morning has been inconveniently interrupted."

"By no means," answered Mrs. Gilbert. "Your friends are delightful; I have had quite a treat, I assure you. I did not attempt to summon Mr. Gilbert, and Fanny has been spending the morning with the Harrises, so Rhoda and I have had them all to ourselves."

Surrey considered this fortunate: Mrs. Gilbert and Rhoda were the only two of the family whom he could have wished to be present. Mr. Gilbert was a little too unpolished, he thought, for the society of Lady Dalton; and Fanny's peevishness, which any slight occasion might call forth, too often amounted to ill-breeding.

“But, William,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “how is it that you never told us of that noble act of yours—the rescue of their lovely child, at the risk of your own life.”

“Ah, Margaret, a life isolated as mine is of little value.”

“Don’t say that! Are you not the unseen mover of many minds? Do not your thoughts, lambent with the light of wisdom, as Miss Dale says, go forth among thousands?”

“It is a very amiable feminine weakness to overrate merit, and I cannot quarrel with you for setting too high a value on my moderate attainments; especially,” added he, with some little embarrassment of manner, “since I have lately had occasion to fear that I had altogether fallen in your good opinion.”

“Well, I frankly confess you have lamentably disappointed me, and that I have highly disappointed of the manner of a certain courtship.”

“Courtship!” exclaimed Surrey, “I do assure you—”

“Nay, hear me out,” interposed Mrs. Gilbert, “on which side the greater blame rests there can

be no difficulty in deciding; but you should never have encouraged such imprudence. And now I know how it is, you are entangled in an engagement that you will repent to the end of your days."

"I have no entanglement of the kind."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert.

"Certainly not. And now, my very good cousin, you must pardon me for observing that it is not in accordance with your usual discriminating good sense to have jumped to this hasty conclusion."

"With all that I have heard and seen how was it possible to do otherwise?"

"If a little passing gallantry is to be viewed in so very serious a light,—if the expression of admiration is to be translated into a declaration of attachment, then indeed you may consider my liberty compromised. But this is not a just view of the case. I have been foolish, I admit, and may have laid myself open to censure, but the penalty of perpetual bondage would be a punishment out of all proportion to the offence."

"If with honour you can escape such an inflic-

tion there is no one who will rejoice more heartily than myself," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Sophy Duckenfield is utterly unworthy of you—"

"No, no," interrupted Surrey. "But it would conduce to the ultimate happiness of neither of us to be yoked together for life. Spending a few weeks pleasantly under the same roof is a totally different affair to the grave business of matrimony. But I most devoutly wish that I had never quitted my beloved mountains and lakes, and put myself in the way of falling into difficulties out of which I perceive, without at the very least a heavy share of ridicule, it is impossible to escape. I am not fit for society; I always told you so, but you would not believe me."

"I am very sorry that your kindness in becoming our guest has proved so severe a penance to you," said Mrs. Gilbert, gravely.

"My dear Margaret, do not, I beseech you, add to my perplexities by misconstruing my hastily spoken words. I am only angry at my own egregious folly. I owe you a thousand

thanks for all your goodness, and my visit has been a delightful one with the exception of this unfortunate cloud that has fallen upon me just as it is about to terminate."

"You are not thinking of leaving us?"

"Yes, I go to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Pray do not quit us in this hasty manner."

"I have already, as you are aware, long outstaid the time I originally purposed being here, and the summer is becoming so far advanced that unless I at once begin my wanderings I can expect very little enjoyment in them. On every account, indeed, I am certain the sooner I am off the better."

"All things considered, I fear I must agree with you. But you take me completely by surprise, and I suspect that your sudden departure will be a terrible blow to certain hopes that are manifestly entertained."

"My intention is already known," said Surrey.

"I am at all events glad of that, it may prevent a stormy scene at the last. But we shall

all miss you sadly, not so much certainly as we should have missed you a few weeks ago, but I will say no more about that now. And do not charge us with ingratitude because, owing to this provoking flirtation, you have met cold looks among us of late."

"Don't talk of ingratitude; it is I who may have seemed guilty of that, I fear," cried Surrey; "I feel you have been quite right, and am thoroughly ashamed of the absurd part I have played."

"Well! for a philosopher, I must confess," said Mrs. Gilbert, laughingly, "you have not acted quite in character."

"Come, come, don't be too hard upon me! After all, I have never affected to be a stock or a stone where your sex are concerned."

"Very true, in spite of your persistence in celibacy. But if *you* are not thinking of matrimony I fancy that some of our bachelors are becoming anxious to enjoy its blessings; Mr. Sandham, for instance, has really all but proposed for Fanny."

“Indeed! I did not know his admiration had reached this length.”

“No, you and somebody else have been so little among us of late, what with long country rambles and private conferences in the study, that I dare say you have not been aware of the frequency of his visits, and the very decided character of his attentions.”

“With true womanly pertinacity you can’t neglect an opportunity of insinuating a well-merited reproof, I perceive, my cousin—but no matter. Well, and is Fanny disposed to be auspicious?”

“Quite so now; at first there was some little hesitation on the ground of his having previously been Emily’s admirer, but by some means or other he has so satisfactorily explained away that difficulty, that Fanny’s jealous scruples are completely vanquished, and she is, I believe, fully prepared to vouchsafe a favourable reply whenever the important question shall be put.”

“I am glad to hear this; rely on it when she becomes a wife her character will assume a more

amiable aspect; there will be new duties to evoke new feelings."

"And what do you think of Mr. Sandham?"

"It appears to me that he is well suited to Fanny. Her mind is not expansive enough to be likely to transgress the narrow limits within which his own thoughts are content to dwell."

"Emily had quite an unreasonable antipathy to him; I hope this will wear off now," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"No doubt it will, it was only as her own lover, I presume, that she objected to him."

"I think she will be very happy in her own choice; Charles Randall is a fine character; but I fear their marriage may be too long deferred, he is about to be placed on half-pay, I understand which would make it impossible at present. You know that in the navy, unfortunately, without interest a young officer's advancement is likely to be very slow, and that he may indeed be altogether laid on the shelf, though fully deserving promotion."

"Has Mr. Randall no friends possessing

influence in high quarters who, in consideration of his merit, may be disposed to exert themselves for him?"

"None whatever, I understand; nor have we either, I am sorry to say."

Mr. Surrey was silent and fell into thought. Mrs Gilbert, accustomed to his meditative mood, did not for some little time attempt to interrupt it, and opening her desk began writing, but presently as she turned over a fresh page:

"My letter is to Emily," she said, "can I say anything for you?"

He did not immediately reply, but rose and walked towards the window; after a short silence however, he said, taking a seat, not in his former place, opposite Mrs. Gilbert, but on a sofa immediately behind her:

"Say for me all that the truest friendship can dictate. Give her my best wishes—my kindest adieu."

There was something in the tone of his voice that struck Mrs. Gilbert painfully, and she hastily looked round, but he was stooping to take

up a book he had that moment let fall, and she could not catch sight of his countenance; she silently resumed her writing.

“I think I must endeavour to run as far as the Briars for half an hour’s chat this evening if I can find time for it,” said Surrey after a while; “but say nothing of my intention, if you please. I found Miss Dale looking extremely ill this morning. I hope, Margaret, you will see her as often as you can, and try to exert your influence to induce her to take more care of herself and less of her friends, for she is obviously suffering from exhaustion and over-wrought feelings.”

“At present,” said Mrs. Gilbert, “she has so great a claim on her compassion that all interference of mine would, I know, be in vain. Her unhappy friend, Mrs. Copeland, is dying.”

“This can be no just cause for grief. With our stern code of morality, death is the kindest refuge for this unfortunate lady.”

“Miss Dale has never forsaken her,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

"And therein she has acted nobly, I have no doubt," observed Surrey.

"And yet how severely she has been condemned for this."

"No matter. She had her own reason to guide her, and the opinion of others was superfluous."

"If she had been a younger woman she could, however, with propriety hardly have taken the part she has; and I must say that she has avoided, as far as possible, letting my girls come in contact with this poor lady."

"I have no doubt the unhappy lady herself shrank from society."

"You know her deplorable history, of course?" said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Very slightly, and possibly I may have been misinformed as to some particulars of it."

"You have not heard it from Miss Dale, then?"

"No."

"I have," said Mrs. Gilbert; "and there is little to distinguish it above a hundred cases of

the same unfortunate description, except that in this instance the faithless wife in a paroxysm of remorse, became her own accuser, and flying alike from her husband and the destroyer of his honor, has from that moment persisted in refusing all pecuniary aid offered by either, and supported herself entirely by her own exertions, principally, I believe, by her pen. Condemned to a life of solitude, for her exclusion from society followed as a matter of course upon the revelation of her fatal error, her mind has, as I am informed, by preying too much on itself, prematurely worn out her body; and notwithstanding that since her short residence in this neighbourhood her health had greatly improved under the influence of a pure atmosphere and the tender assiduities of her friend, there was no strength left to resist the ravages of a severe and sudden illness that attacked her a few weeks ago, and from the effects of which she must, Dr. Bassett is of opinion, inevitably sink, and he considers her end now very near at hand."

"And has Miss Dale to endure this trying

scene alone? Are there no relatives or former friends of this poor lady who can be summoned to attend her in this last extremity of her suffering?"

"She has been so completely cast off by them all, that the very mention of an appeal to them now agitates her painfully, but I understand that she has at last expressed a wish to see her daughter, who is to be summoned forthwith. It will be a terrible meeting. She left this daughter a mere child, and has never since beheld her."

"There is something deplorably at fault, Margaret, in the moral treatment which cases of this unfortunate description receive at the hands of society; the day must come that they will be more wisely dealt with."

"You would not wish them to go unpunished?"

"I would at least not have all the punishment fall on one side, and that the weakest," answered Surrey.

"It is a very difficult subject to interfere with," observed Mrs. Gilbert.

"It is, and we must have patience. There

must be a gradual recognition of many errors in our social system before any rational change can be effected in our manner of dealing with it."

"I confess I am of opinion it had best remain as it is," said Mrs. Gilbert; "marriage cannot be regarded in too sacred a light."

"True; but its being rendered more easily dissoluble by law would, I believe, rivet rather than loosen the true nature of such a bond," said Surrey.

"Ah! now you are getting quite beyond my depth: but, explain as you might, I feel sure that in this matter you never could make a proselyte of me," cried Mrs. Gilbert.

Surrey smiled.

"Against such a womanly conviction I would by no means attempt to argue," said he, "and at all events we must discuss the subject no farther while that letter is before you, if you would finish it for to-day's post."

"I have very nearly completed my portion of it, but Rhoda is to contribute her share; I promised to leave a blank page, and I fancy she

will not be able to write till the evening, if, as I suspect, she is gone to see poor Davis, who is very ill."

"Indeed! I saw him in the office only yesterday, I think."

"Yes, he was there in the morning, but was taken suddenly ill afterwards, with something of a paralytic seizure, as it seems. Poor old man! I much fear he will never be fit for work again."

"Can you venture to let Rhoda be this poor sick man's visitor? You can hardly have forgotten Doctor Bassett's injunctions regarding her."

"He pronounces her perfectly well now," answered Mrs. Gilbert; "and the grief she would feel if forbidden to approach her old favorite in his present pitiable condition would be far more injurious to her than a visit to his sick bed could possibly be."

"You certainly ought to know best," answered Surrey, "but for my own part, I confess that from a painful excitement of this nature I should have been most anxious to guard her."

"This is not the first time you have inspired me with a vague alarm when speaking of this dear child. What is it you dread for her?"

"I can scarcely give shape to my apprehensions, but I acknowledge I have fears that all is not well with her."

"Her spirits are variable, certainly," observed Mrs. Gilbert; "she is sometimes very gay, but at others, without apparent cause, somewhat sad, or at least more pensively thoughtful than one can wish to see a girl of her years; but her health is good, and just now she sometimes looks quite blooming."

"Yes, I perceive the little pale face that I used to look at with so much interest is assuming a new kind of beauty; but as far as health is concerned, I would far rather see it without that changeable colour it now wears."

"I don't know how she will bear the news of your intended departure. Her little heart is very fondly attached to you."

"Owing to the rigour of your late government, my good cousin, she cannot now miss me much."

“Well, William, you must acknowledge that it would have been highly reprehensible if I had not, as far as possible, prevented that dear innocent child from being a witness of conduct capable of calling a blush into her young cheek.”

“I do not blame you, Margaret,” answered Surrey, looking somewhat disconcerted; “but you must allow me to say that I believe your imagination has outrun reality in the case alluded to.”

“I can hardly admit that, after what I have myself heard and seen. And although, as I before remarked, I consider Mrs. Duckenfield a thousand times more to blame than—”

“Oh!” interrupted Surrey, “do not I implore you go over that topic again. It has been a very silly affair altogether, but it is at an end now; and you will so shortly be released from the presence of one at least of the offending parties, that I hope the whole matter will soon be forgotten. And now I really must go and make some little preparation for my journey.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Surrey's intended departure was announced by Mrs. Gilbert at the family dinner-table it was little commented on. Mr. Gilbert received the information coldly enough, merely saying there was no time to be lost if a summer tour was in contemplation.

Mrs. Duckenfield withheld the expression of her feelings, unless, indeed, it was to be read in the fond glances she cast on her favorite whenever she could succeed in catching his eye. Fanny was mute; and her brother was endeavouring to stifle a laugh as he mischievously watched the direction of the fair widow's looks. It was manifest to Surrey that he had outstaid

his welcome. Just, however, as he had arrived at this unsatisfactory conclusion, a gentle little hand sought his, and a pale little countenance was turned towards him in silent sorrow. He fondly returned the pressure of the innocent hand and smiled kindly on the sweet young face. He hardly deserved, he thought, even this solitary demonstration of regret in the family circle, to which a few months before he had been so readily admitted. Why had he not gone some weeks ago, when his departure would, he knew, have been regretted by one and all of that friendly party? Or, rather—why had he been weak enough to fall into a dilemma from which it would be no easy task to extricate himself? Why had he not more sacredly guarded his feelings? Why allowed them to be moved by allurements that had no power over his heart? But it was of little avail now to catechise himself thus severely; he was already, in some measure, reaping the reward of his folly. He was being looked on with displeasure or ridicule where, till lately, he had been regarded with respect and partial

favor. And there was an absent one to whose ear, no doubt, exaggerated reports of the absurdities into which he had been drawn would find their way, and whose esteem he must expect to forfeit in consequence. This, he felt, would be his severest punishment, but assuredly he well deserved it: in the fullest sense of the term he must pronounce himself an egregious simpleton.

Just as he arrived at this sensible conclusion, accidentally raising his eyes he met those of Mrs. Duckenfield fixed on him, with a look so full of tender meaning that he had the mortification of feeling himself colour under her glance, conscious that there were those present who were furtively observing them both. But at this juncture Mrs. Gilbert's tact came to his relief. She began talking of Sir James and Lady Dalton, and of Surrey's rescue of their child; and although this was a topic which at any other time he would have wished avoided, he now hailed it as a fortunate diversion from the scrutiny he was undergoing, and continued silently to eat his mutton in a more satisfactory frame of mind. Presently, however, he became annoyed at hearing an act,

which to him had seemed so simple, extolled, as he thought, unduly, for the whole party were enthusiastic in their admiration of it, lauding his courage and humanity in terms which he was obliged at last explicitly to tell them, it was extremely painful to him to hear.

“Well, well, I can understand that sort of feeling, and it is best we should say no more on the matter, but we may appreciate it none the less,” cried Mr. Gilbert rising, and cordially shaking him by the hand, “and now I really must be off at once to the office, I have not a moment to spare; without poor Davis I have more on my hands than I can well get through. Come, Master Andrew, you must bestir yourself too.”

“Oh, my dear, stay at least and take one glass of wine,” cried Mrs. Gilbert.

“Well, my love, I can’t refuse you, here’s to your good health, Surrey, and may we see you amongst us again before long!”

“Thank you,” said Surrey warmly, really moved by Mr. Gilbert’s expression of goodwill.

“Fill your glass, Andrew, fill your glasses all

round, my dears, and I must fill mine again too, while I give you a toast, Health and happiness to our good friend !”

As Surrey looked around in grateful acknowledgment, he perceived tears in the eyes of more than one of that little party. It was manifest that the tide of his favour had returned. But Mrs. Duckenfield now beginning to utter tender lamentations touching his intended departure, and to call on all present to join her in persuading him to give up his determination, he was glad to take advantage of Mr. Gilbert's example, and at once making his escape from the party on the plea of having letters to write for that evening's post, went into his study. As he lounged there in his customary seat, the low leather chair near the writing table, how pleasant seemed to him the quiet of that little retreat, how delightful the cool evening air, fragrant with the breath of flowers, that stole in at the open window, and how softly with that garden perfume came to him the thought of Emily—Emily tending her flowers, blooming as they, and with a cheerful smile for

him as he loitered beside her under the pretence of assisting in her labour. But that was all over now. There would be another to take his place beside her when next she busied herself in that fragrant plot of ground. Another on whom to bestow a smile more tender than the gay glance in which the grave scholar had sometimes sunned himself. And so let it be! If she were happy that should suffice him. In content he would return again to his old delights, the sight of wave, and sun and flying cloud. In the solitary path, the silent meditation, he would continue his search after truth. Social pleasures, social labours were not for him, but his hermit life should not be unprofitably spent; he would at least endeavour to clear away some of the obstacles that lay in the way of the discovery he was attempting, so that those who followed after him should tread securely in his footsteps, and perhaps advance farther than he.

His eye fell on a pile of manuscript. Would his labour be effectual? Through his instrumentality would humanity hereafter have one error,

one sorrow, one crime the less! The answer should be pronounced by the unseen future. He closed his eyes and fell into thought so deep, that after a while the wearied brain sought rest in change, and the philosophical meditation gave place to the fantastic dream.

But the striking of a clock, the ringing of a bell, or some such slight alarm, shortly roused him from this accidental repose, and he began to busy himself in preparation for his departure,—to collect the books that lay scattered on chair and table, to search here and there for a missing page of manuscript,—to put aside an embroidery frame that lay side by side with his writing desk,—to remove a gorgeously tinted shawl that hung over the back of his chair. As his touch met the soft folds of the Indian drapery and his eye lingered over the half finished tapestry, something like a regretful sigh escaped him; never, he thought, again in studious haunt of his, would traces like these bear witness against its unbroken solitude; never again would his stern meditations, his ascetic resolutions, be scat-

tered to the winds by the glance of a soft eye, the pressure of a fond hand. And was it wise to forego love that was so frankly and so freely bestowed? Was it wise to prefer a chill solitude to the companionship of a fair woman? Yes, his aspiration was for love purer than that which was now proffered to him, for a companion sweeter than the gay enchantress from whose snare he was about to escape. Alas! he sighed for the unattainable.—Then welcome solitude! He would at once set the seal to his determination; and forthwith he opened his desk and began to write. A few words sufficed. He had but to state his intention of being in London on the following day, and to desire that his customary lodging there should be in readiness for him. His letter concluded, he sallied forth and left it at the post-office. It was a lovely evening. In the narrow street through which he was passing, a cool fragrant air, fresh from the fields beyond, swept softly along, and a slanting gleam of golden light came glittering from the fair sunset. He must stroll into the open country to

enjoy the charming hour; and presently he was on the way to his favourite resort, the wide common, that lay beyond the sheltered lanes and enclosed pastures immediately surrounding the quiet little town. His rapid steps soon brought him to the accustomed haunt, and pausing in his speed, he slowly gazed on the wide horizon stretched before his view. The sun had gone down, but there was a living glory where his flaming disc had lately glowed. Dusky clouds, breaking into flakes of gold, or brightening into roseate hues, spread upwards fading in illimitable space, while over the dewy earth there slowly stole the deepening twilight.

In rapt admiration he contemplated the transfigured vapour till the last brilliant tint melted in obscurity, and a solitary star glittered in the doubtful gloom; when reluctantly withdrawing his gaze, he began to bend his steps homeward, his mind invigorated by the pure delight it had quaffed through the finest organ of sense, and his whole being refreshed by its brief abstraction from perplexing thought. He had nearly reached the town before he remembered his in-

tention of calling on Miss Dale. He turned back, however, and was soon at the Briars, but on arriving at his friend's abode, had the disappointment of finding that she was absent. Accepting, nevertheless, Dinah's invitation to "walk in and rest himself," he entered the pleasant little apartment, where heretofore he had passed so many a serene and social hour. For awhile, in mere pensive thought, he sat at the open window, inhaling the fragrance of the delicate flowers clustering around it. Out of this somewhat dreamy mood he was roused by the entrance of the neat-handed Dinah, who, having considerably prepared tea, now set before him the welcome refreshment. The kind creature loitered in her attendance on him, glad of an opportunity of confiding to him her anxiety for the health of her mistress, who was, she said, wearing out her life in her exertions for her sick friend; depriving herself of needful rest, and foregoing her ordinary avocations for the sake of watching day after day, and sometimes night after night, by the bedside of the sufferer.

"And it's more than her strength can bear, or

her spirits either," continued Dinah; "she is wasting away, sir, and often and often I see the tears running down her pale cheeks."

And the faithful creature began to wipe away her own tears with the corner of her apron.

Surrey endeavoured to comfort her. This state of things could not endure long, he said; he understood that the poor sick lady was near her end; that she would soon be removed beyond the reach of all care. Miss Dale would then have rest, and would soon, he hoped, be restored to her usual state of health. But Dinah was despondent, and only shook her head dismally in reply. Ascertaining that there was little probability of her mistress's return home till late, if indeed at all that evening, Surrey requested to be furnished with writing materials, and at the expiration of about half an hour he had completed a letter of four pages, which after having sealed and directed, he placed on Miss Dale's reading table, leaving beside it a little sprig of purple heath that he had gathered on the common. It was now full time to resume his homeward

walk, but first he must look into the familiar painting room, and opening the well-known door, he went towards the easel, uncovered it, and looked long at an unfinished painting that lay there: the contemplation of it, however, seemed to be suggestive of some painful thought, for with a heavy sigh he turned away from the picture, and there was sorrowful gravity on his countenance, as presently afterwards passing along the garden path, he plucked a rose from a tree whence a kind hand had often before gathered one for him. The twilight was nearly deepening into darkness and the air becoming chill, when entering the quiet lane, Surrey proceeded on his homeward way, the melancholy of his mood increasing with the cheerlessness of the hour. He reproached himself for his late neglect of one whose gentle companionship had heretofore so often proved his best solace, and recalled with a feeling akin to envy the time when placid friendship had sufficed to fill the void in his heart occasioned by early disappointment in love. How wise, he now thought, would it have been

if with this he had continued content, if his heart had not a second time cast itself on a perilous venture. Yet how could it have been possible to resist the sweet influence of daily intercourse with a being lovely and amiable as Emily? And suppose her heart had been free, should he have failed to win it? The question was a doubtful one—and now, alas! how vain to ask. But if for the love that had gradually and almost unconsciously been awakened, he could find excuse in the worth and the purity of its object, there could be no similar apology furnished for the weakness to which he had more recently succumbed—an infatuation kindled at the breath of vanity, and fanned into fickle warmth by the alluring favors lavished by an indiscreet tenderness. Assuredly, as he had proved himself so woefully vulnerable, it were wise in him for the future to forswear woman's society, to seek again the meditative solitude into which thought of her seldom intruded, and that for so large a portion of his life had sufficed for his content.

So reasoned Surrey, as in a vein of self-condemnation he reviewed certain passages of the visit he was about to terminate. But he had now reached the Gilberts' door. Light from the cheerful little drawing-room streamed on the pavement as he stood there a moment in lingering meditation before crossing the threshold. He would not join the family party to-night, but would complete the preparations for his departure, and he at once proceeded to his study. The lamp was burning there as he entered, and various articles were lying about, much as he had left them, yet it struck him that there was something unusual in the appearance of the room, but without bestowing a second thought on the matter he threw himself into the large easy chair that seemed inviting him to rest, and somewhat wearied was falling into a half drowsy state, when feeling the atmosphere about him oppressive in contrast with the cool open air from which he had just come, he slowly roused himself with the intention of throwing open the window, and now observed that, contrary to custom, the

curtains were closely drawn, which no doubt was the cause of the unfamiliar appearance he had noticed on first entering, as well as of the unusual closeness of the apartment. He languidly rose, and was in the act of drawing aside the offending drapery, when his hand was seized in a warm soft clasp, and as, with an involuntary movement of surprise he started backwards, Mrs. Duckenfield, radiant with smiles and in full evening costume, issued from behind the folds of the window curtain. This practical jest played off at his expense, was by no means agreeable to him, and he maintained a grave silence, while the lady now laughing immoderately at the success of her exploit, stood unabashed before him; but presently, becoming aware that her hilarity was in no wise responded to, and that on the contrary a glance expressive of reproof continued steadily fixed on her, with sudden transition of feeling, her laughter gave place to weeping; and in hysterical agitation she sank on a chair, burying her face in her hands, and uttering, between sighs and sobs, invectives against the cruelty of man.

Surrey could not but approach her, could not but attempt to pacify such painful emotion, and he was becoming apprehensive of a repetition of the scene of the morning,—he must check those rising cries. If in the endeavour to do so he had recourse to soothing endearments it seemed to him that he could succeed by no other means. But the remedy was a dangerous one. As the hysterical agitation subsided, his tenderness was more than returned, and a seductive whisper stole into his ear. Should he accede to the request that it assuredly implied? Should he take for the companion of his life the fair woman so ready to bestow herself upon him? His heart answered, ‘No,’ and he courageously uttered a reply in accordance with its wise decision, but although he strove to soften the unwelcome negative by expressing it in the mildest phrase capable of conveying its true meaning, it was met by a storm of lamentation and reproach, for the violence of which he was totally unprepared; but he continued firm, and when the paroxysm had somewhat spent itself, the lady became more reasonable, and did not

refuse between sobs and interjections to listen to such consolation as he was ready to bestow. She had also her own source of comfort. She should see him again to-morrow; he was not going till the afternoon, there would be one more opportunity of trying her power over him. With this thought her brow began to clear, she resumed the full flow of lively fascination which she but too well knew how to practise, and was conscious that her captivating arts were re-asserting their influence over him. He found her mood, it must be confessed, but too bewitching and her appearance struck him as more than usually charming. Her eyes seemed brighter for the tears that had recently obscured them, and her smiles more enchanting for having been transiently clouded. Her beauty was also enhanced by her style of dress; a brilliant scarlet blossom carelessly placed in her hair becomingly relieved its raven hue; and the dark colour of the rich gown she wore made more striking by contrast, the almost snowy whiteness of the half veiled

neck and arms about which hung some glittering ornaments.

But the sense of her attractions made Surrey dread his own relenting mood. He abruptly started up—a small time-piece that stood on the mantel-shelf struck eleven—a late hour in that sober household—and an unseasonable one, he knew for him to be entertaining a visitor, though he found the fair lady was of a less scrupulous opinion. After much idle delay, however, and inveigling successfully for a parting caress, not a little to his relief she crept away on tiptoe to her own apartment.

Once more alone, Surrey reflected that his dangerous visitor had very nearly triumphed over the resolutions he had so lately formed. He must not see her again, and in order to be secure of this, he must take his departure at an earlier hour than he had intended. Mrs. Duckenfield was habitually a late riser, a custom she had found so inconvenient to the Gilberts that lately she had invariably breakfasted in her own room; he would be certain therefore to avoid meeting

her if he were to go immediately after the early family breakfast; this, then, he would do, packing up to-night, and setting off on his journey by the nine o'clock train to-morrow. In accordance with this determination he set to work in good earnest and had soon completed his arrangements. He had a sleepless night and was glad to refresh himself after it by an early walk in search of a porter to take charge of his luggage, and having despatched it to be in waiting for him at the station,—thereby putting the necessity of his departure beyond a doubt,—he found that he had still time for a stroll in the fields on the outskirts of the town. It was a delightful morning. A light mist hung over the distant prospect, investing it with a thin silvery haze, while around him the sunbeams fell brightly on the dewy pasture, flashing into brilliancy the countless drops that freshened the abundant herbage. A profusion of wild flowers growing beneath the hedgerows yielded a delicious odour; and there was the murmur of a running stream hid len from sight by the long grass closing over

it, distinctly heard amidst the blithe chorus of birds that was on all sides resounding. Quiet cattle were peacefully grazing, and in a hedge-side nook was a little group of bare-headed sun-burnt children absorbed in their enjoyment of some harmless sport. The whole scene was one of cheerful serenity, and Surrey felt its salutary influence steal into his spirit in the pure and healthful tone of thought, superseding the vexatious reflections that had recently oppressed him. Returning from his ramble, refreshed and invigorated, finding that he was still too early for the breakfast hour, and attracted by a slender little form that he perceived bending over a flower bed, he strolled into the garden. Looking fondly on the pensive little face that was gently lifted at his approach, he stooped and imprinted a kiss on the cheek of his little favorite.

“You will not forget me, my pet?”

“Oh, no! But you are not going now?”

“Not immediately.”

“How I wish that you were not going at all! But you will come back before very long?”

"I don't know, Rhoda. I think I had better never come back. I think I had better build me a hermit's cell and there dwell content."

"Oh, no! You must only just go away now for a pleasant summer excursion, and come back to us again before the winter: and then Emily will be at home, and we shall all be so happy."

"Will you say 'good bye,' for me to Emily?"

"Yes, but she will be so sorry."

"No, no, my little Rhoda, she is too happy now to be made sorry by anything. But there is Fanny at the window, calling us to breakfast, so you must leave your gardening for the present," and taking her hand he ran with her up the garden path, and they entered the house just as Fanny was impatiently coming forward with a second summons.

Surrey did not disclose his change of plan, in regard to the time of his departure. He exerted himself to converse cheerfully during breakfast, but at length, after glancing at his watch, he started up.

"I must be off at once or I shall miss the train. A thousand thanks to you all for your

kindness. Forgive this abrupt departure, I had no courage for a more lingering farewell, it is bad enough to have to say good bye at all; God bless you!" and shaking hands with each one of the little party, amidst vehement exclamations of surprise and regret, the task of leave taking was quickly accomplished. But there were a few last words between him and Mrs. Gilbert, as they stood together at the house door.

"I think I can guess your reason for this early departure. But what will Sophy Duckenfield say?"

"I must trust to your kindness to make my adieus to her, and to apologise for me in the best way you can."

"I will not fail. And I believe you are acting wisely."

"Better late than never!"

They shook hands once more.

"Good bye! good bye!"

He looked back before he was out of sight of the house, and there was a pang at his heart in which the fair widow had no share, as withdrawing his gaze from it he hurried onwards.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS DALE had at length altogether taken up her abode under the same roof with her suffering friend, who now, conscious of her approaching end, was becoming painfully anxious to behold her daughter, and impatient that the summons which had been despatched to her remained unanswered.

“Will she come?—will she come?” she cried, waking out of a disturbed sleep,

At the sound of the hollow voice Miss Dale, wan with watching, yet with soothing reply, bent over the pillow on which the haggard face of the enquirer was restlessly turning from side to side. But the eager question was repeated, “Will she come?”

“Dear Jane, she will soon be here,” and the kind watcher took softly hold of the emaciated hand that was convulsively grasping the coverlet.

“Will she curse me?” hoarsely whispered the dying woman, partly raising herself, and fixing her hollow eyes fearfully and searchingly on the countenance of her companion; “will she curse me?”

“Your own child!”

“Is it not my due?”

“You have repented, my dear,” cried Miss Dale, casting her arms round the attenuated form, and clasping it to her bosom, while her tears fell plentifully, “you have repented.”

Her caress was feebly returned, and as the unhappy lady sank back exhausted on the pillow, one or two large drops slowly rolled from the sunken eyes, but before they had dried on the emaciated cheek the lids heavily closed, and a sleep or stupor stole over the sufferer.

Miss Dale continued her watch, keeping her eyes fixed on the wan countenance of the

sleeper, and blessing the death-like insensibility that gave a temporary respite to mental and bodily anguish. As she gazed on the care-marked brow, the sharpened features, the hollow cheeks, all tinged with the ghastly hue of mortal sickness, she found it difficult to realize in the hapless being before her, the identity of the friend of her youth, the gay, beautiful girl, exultant in the power of her charms, and rejoicing in a wealth of fancy whose resplendent coloring clothed with brilliancy her prospects for the future.

Alas! for the marriage too hastily formed! Alas! for the sin of its broken tie! Was the severity of the punishment too great that had followed the guilty rupture of the sacred compact; those long years of solitude, of sorrow, of shame, that had been painfully but uncomplainingly endured, till nature could bear no more, and was now herself calling death to her aid? And if but a just amount of suffering had been imposed on the erring woman, how had society dealt with the acknowledged partner of her

crime—her tempter, her seducer? Had it thrust him forth with ignominy? Had it closed to him one avenue to prosperity—to happiness? Was he not at this very moment an approved servant of the state, loaded with dignity, regarded with reverence? Was he not a cherished husband, an honoured father? For him the world had no memory of the transgression that had severed the holiest bonds of social life. Indignant virtue was satisfied to inflict no chastisement on the strong, it poured the full measure of its wrath on the weak.

Miss Dale's sorrowful meditation was interrupted: there was the sound of an approaching carriage—it stopped; her heart beat painfully—she endeavoured to still its tumult, to prepare herself for a dreaded interview, but before she could succeed in tranquillizing her feelings, the door of the apartment was opened, and instead of the expected stranger, to her extreme relief Doctor Bassett entered. He silently approached the bedside of his patient, looked intently at the pallid countenance, counted the feeble pulse,

touched the region of the heart, but the heavy slumber continued unbroken.

“How long has she been thus?” he enquired.

“Less than half an hour.”

He once more placed his finger on the wrist.

“She will wake again?” whispered Miss Dale fearfully.

“Yes, and probably there will be no important change for the next eight and forty hours.”

“Thank God! She may live to see her daughter, then.”

“How is it that young lady is not here now? You told me she had been summoned two days ago.”

“I don’t know; she has been expected since yesterday.”

“You ought not to be taking her place here. You are killing yourself.”

Miss Dale smiled sadly.

“Not quite so bad as that,” she said.

“Come down stairs; I must talk to you. Where’s the nurse?”

"Gone to lie down."

"Let her get up then. Is not she ten times stronger than you are?"

"Hush! hush!" cried Miss Dale, pointing to his patient.

"You need not fear. That poor creature is too far gone to be easily disturbed; and that heavy stupor is one of the symptoms of the rapid progress of her disease. But there is no occasion for your looking so alarmed. As I have already told you, she will wake by and bye; meanwhile, come you with me, and let the nurse keep watch."

"I will call her, and follow you down stairs immediately."

"Put your bonnet on, I must have a talk with you, and I have no time to waste here. You can go with me as far as the next village, I will drive you back within an hour."

"But I am every moment expecting the—"

"No excuse," interrupted the Doctor peremptorily, "do as I bid you."

His words were rough, but there was a kind

glance of his eye not to be misinterpreted, and Miss Dale hastened to obey him.

“I should like to know what right you have to trifle with your health in the manner you do,” said Doctor Bassett, as presently afterwards they were rapidly driving across the wide common. Do you think being day and night in a sick room is the way to preserve it?”

“How can I desert my poor friend at her utmost need?”

“Nobody wants you to do it. But there is, or there ought to be, reason in all things; and I positively prohibit your remaining up with her this night. I have provided an efficient nurse, and it is her business to keep watch twelve hours out of the twenty-four, at all events, and I shall insist on her doing so.”

“Indeed she is a good willing creature, and she was up during half of last night.”

“And you during the whole of it?”

“Yes, but it was not her fault that I was.”

“And you consider this superfluous watch on your part highly commendable, I have no doubt;

and yet I will venture to say you can talk as fluently as any one against the sin of committing suicide."

"Oh, Doctor Bassett!"

"A strong dose of prussic acid might, to be sure, settle the business for you more quickly, but not more effectually than persistence in the course you are now pursuing."

"You are not in earnest. You are merely trying to alarm me."

"It is no such thing; over fatigue, excessive anxiety, and want of due rest, are quite sufficient in one of your constitution to produce ultimately fatal results."

"I cannot help thinking that you exaggerate the danger."

"Very well, if my opinion goes for nothing with you, for the future you had better not have recourse to it."

"My dear Doctor, don't be angry with me!"

"How can I be otherwise than angry when I see you so obstinately bent on injuring yourself?"

"You don't seem to take into account the

claim there is on my compassion. My unhappy friend is so desolate!"

"The just consequence of her transgression."

"Oh, be not so severe!"

"And be not you so morbidly indulgent, so prone to pity without tracing cause and effect. It is an habitual weakness of yours."

"I will not defend myself from your imputation in a general way; but in this instance indeed you are mistaken."

"Not at all. I know the leading facts of the case. This poor creature has earned her punishment."

"At all events she has borne it nobly; this you must acknowledge."

"I do not acknowledge any such thing. Instead of humbly resigning herself to it there has been a warfare in her mind opposing the sense of its justice, and under this she has sunk."

"I believe indeed," said Miss Dale, "that grief and shame have had a large share in undermining her health, and also that too great mental toil has had part in it."

“It is a pity that what you term mental toil was not applied to a more useful purpose.”

“Have you read any of her productions?”

“Not I! I have not time enough for attention to facts; much less have I any to throw away upon fiction.”

“In this instance if you had bestowed your notice on it you would have found a vein of truth in every page.”

“Embedded in a stratum of falsehood and consequently worthless, if not dangerous.”

“How little respect you have for genius!”

“Genius is a thing I hear a great deal about, but for the life of me I can never find out what it is.”

“And yet I have known you on more than one occasion pay involuntary homage to it.”

“Involuntary fiddlestick! Don’t let your imagination run wild and make such a goose of you.”

“Dear doctor!”

“Well, well, you are a sensible woman in the main, I must acknowledge, though you do now

and then put one out of patience with some of your ridiculous high flown jargon."

"The very last thing I should have suspected myself to be guilty of."

"We are all more or less blind to our own faults, you know," said the doctor, "and I believe after all you have fewer than most of us. And you are a good natured creature; you don't bear malice against me for being once in a way, perhaps, a little too plain spoken."

"Bear malice against my kind physician because he occasionally considers it advisable to administer to me a somewhat unpalatable medicine!" exclaimed Miss Dale.

"That's right—that's the proper way of viewing it!"

"It would be impossible for me to view it in any other way; I know that you live but to do good in one way or another."

"And what besides should I or any one else live for?"

"But unfortunately it is very far from being the object of life in general."

“So much the worse.”

“True. And I hope the consciousness of this is gradually spreading, and that it will be the means of eventually leading to a better and a happier state of things.”

“There is need enough for improvement,” said the doctor, “look where you may.”

“Yes, and it is consolatory to see that improvement is quietly creeping along in many an unsuspected quarter.”

“I wish I could discover it.”

“So you would if you had time. I can detect it in many a minute particular of every day life.”

“I suspect that you and I might be very likely to differ as to what is improvement. Your friend, the philosopher, as you call him, has, I believe, inoculated you with some of his opinions.”

“Now, Doctor Bassett, you are both working in the same field, and with the same object, though in such an opposite manner.”

“Don’t tell me that.”

“Yes, indeed. You weed—he sows.”

“Let him take good care what he sows, then!”

“If one might venture to retort by giving a caution in return—” said Miss Dale somewhat hesitatingly,

“Well, go on, what then?”

“One might say, take good care to weed out only what is worthless or pernicious.”

“Quite fair! quite fair!”

There was a pause in their conversation, and presently, Doctor Bassett slackening the speed at which he had driven over the sunny common, they proceeded leisurely through secluded lanes, fragrant with the fresh perfume of green leaves, and melodious with snatches of song, in which social birds, fluttering from bough to bough, were holding cheerful converse. A light air was blowing, gently lifting the branches, and letting in sparkles of sunshine between the moving leaves, while the smooth ground they were traversing was fantastically chequered with the tremulous reflection of varied light and shade.

It was hardly possible to be insensible to the pleasant influence of the hour; and gradually on the countenance of Miss Dale, which had previously worn an anxious and oppressed expression, there stole an aspect of peace; while her pale cheek, freshening in the breeze, became tinted with a faint hue of health.

"Oh, sweet Nature! What balsam is like thine?" thought she, and turning to her companion with a smile, "you are a wise physician," she said.

He apprehended her meaning, "fresh air and sunshine are better restoratives than any with which the druggist's shop could furnish you," he said; "pray bear this in mind; and when you fall again into the state in which I found you to-day, don't like a foolish woman, be having recourse to *sal-volatile*, or any such trash, but tie on your bonnet and get into the open country. And now I shall set you down here while I go on to visit a patient. Walk on to the turnpike; I will take you up there in the course of half-an-hour."

“I would rather walk back,” said Miss Dale, as she alighted; “my poor friend may awake and look for me, or her daughter may arrive.”

“Tush! tush!” exclaimed the Doctor impatiently, “I will allow of no such thing. Let me find you at the turnpike at the time appointed;” and he drove rapidly off.

Miss Dale looked at her watch; there was no time to loiter, a long walk was before her, but already renovated both in mind and body by the refreshing influences surrounding her, and by the change of thought that a little social communion had induced, she felt not unequal to undertake it, and at a quicker pace than was customary to her, she was presently traversing a broad meadow, where some timid sheep were cropping the short grass, and above, the song of the lark was melodiously ringing in the blue air. Surrey was beside her the last time she had trodden the pleasant path on which she was now advancing, and she well-remembered how together they had almost involuntarily stayed their steps and mutely listened to that blithe carol—

how, afterwards they had fallen into discourse about a common field flower carelessly plucked by one or other of them, and to what a philosophical discussion it accidentally led. What knowledge she had gathered in that loitering ramble' What incentive to study! What food for thought! How pleasant was the memory of it! The blank of absence was unfelt. Mind seemed still communing with mind, as the lark sang, the fleecy cloud floated in the blue heavens, the verdure sprang fresh upon the path. The dreamer pursued her way unconscious of its solitude; and involuntarily slackening her pace fell into her usual deliberate step, passing through meadow after meadow in lingering enjoyment, and occasionally pausing as some object on the way brought to her mind a more vivid recollection of look or word, an actual presence, as it almost seemed, of a precious friend.

Thus absorbed in thought, she had forgotten the lapse of time, and mechanically moving onwards came at last to the pasture skirting the high road; but here she was roused out of her

meditation by hearing the well-known voice of Doctor Bassett shouting to her from the other side of the hedge, where was the turnpike at which he had appointed to meet her. Hastening forward, in no little trepidation at the suspicion of having unreasonably detained him, she narrowly escaped a fall in clambering over the awkward stile that was the only medium of approach to the highway.

“What need was there to run the risk of breaking your legs?” said the Doctor, as she stepped into his gig.

“I was in such a hurry; I feared I had kept you waiting.”

“And you thought such a catastrophe as that would mend the matter.”

“I did not think of the probability of any such accident befalling me.”

“No, your wits were wool-gathering, as I will venture to say they have been ever since I left you. Now what have you to say for yourself for not making your appearance till very nearly an hour after the time you ought to have been here?”

"Not quite as long as that, I hope. But I really am very sorry for my want of punctuality."

"You only just escaped having to walk all the way back, I can assure you. I was on the point of driving off when I caught sight of your ladyship in yonder field, moving along at a snail's pace, as if my loss of time were of no consequence whatever."

"To confess the truth, I had forgotten that you were waiting for me."

"Not a very flattering acknowledgment I must say."

"Dear Doctor, I could never think of flattering *you*."

"That's right. I'm glad of it."

"My walk was so delightful, and has done me so much good, that I do hope you will forgive me."

"Well, well, you do look the better for it, I perceive."

"It has quite revived me. I have scarcely been out of doors at all lately. I have not gone to Woodridge for many a day. Can you give me any tidings of my friends there?"

“What, of the Gilberts? To be sure I can. Emily is come back; and they have lost their visitor.”

“One of them I know,” said Miss Dale, “went a few days ago.”

“Well, and the other is started off in pursuit of him.”

“You don’t mean it!”

“But I do. And I wish him joy of his charmer.”

“But, Doctor Bassett, you can’t be serious. Mrs. Duckenfield and Mr. Surrey are surely not together.”

“They are both in London at all events.”

“Oh, in London! That is a wide place.”

“Not too wide for a pair of lovers to meet, I suppose.”

“No, but I don’t allow that my friend and that lady come under that designation.”

“Don’t you? Where have been your eyes and ears then?”

“I know there has been a foolish flirtation, but as to anything more serious, I don’t believe it.”

“You consider the gentleman too wise, I suppose, to barter his liberty for the sake of a lively companion. But let me tell you, he is just the sort of man to be taken in by the kind of attractions possessed by the lady in question.”

“You admit that she has attractions then. I thought you, for your part, anything but admired her.”

“One can’t deny that she is a taking sort of person.”

“You have changed your opinion then.”

“Very likely. I have seen a good deal of her lately.”

“You think her handsome?”

“No, that is not exactly the term I should use; but altogether she is attractive enough,—and knows it too.”

“For my part,” said Miss Dale, “I confess I cannot admire her.”

“To be sure not! One woman never can admire another, let her be as charming as an angel.”

“I must be permitted to say you are quite in

the wrong there; but perhaps the qualities we exalt most highly are of a different order to those which find favour with you."

"It all comes to the same thing. A woman attractive enough to gain the admiration of our sex is never appreciated by her own."

"Oh, don't say that! Think of Emily Gilbert for instance."

"She is one of the few exceptions to the truth of my remark, and a very charming creature she is."

"We shall soon lose her, I suppose."

"No, I fancy the marriage cannot take place yet. The widow will have the start of her."

"Now, Doctor Bassett, if you include Mr. Surrey in that assumption I really must contradict it. He will never marry Mrs Duckenfield."

"That is a bold assertion on your part. Are you authorized to make it?"

"I am."

"What on earth then has he been playing the gallant for? I doubt whether he will be let off as easily as he may expect."

"Rely on it, he is not one to be cajoled into such a serious step as matrimony. And I cannot believe that he has given just cause for expectations that he has no intention of fulfilling."

"Let me tell you he has been playing a ticklish sort of game then."

"I suppose he was almost in the net before he was aware of it. And after all it was merely his fancy that was caught."

"Don't talk to me about his fancy. And don't attempt to justify him!"

"I don't pretend to consider him blameless," said Miss Dale; "he has acted weakly, as men are very prone to do under the influence of flattery."

"They are, are they? And pray what have you to say for the conduct of women under the same condition?"

"Oh, they are accustomed to flattery; it makes far less impression upon them."

"Don't tell me they are indifferent to it! Why, it is the very breath of their nostrils!"

"They don't get much of it from you, my dear Doctor."

"No, no, I take good care of that."

"And yet you know you are a favourite with them."

"That is to say, they pat me when I growl, for fear I should bite."

"Well, I must confess we are a little afraid of you."

"I am very glad to hear it. There would be no managing you at all if you were not."

"You may be gratified to learn, then, that I absolutely tremble at the sight of you, when on some unlucky occasions I feel that I have not obeyed to the letter your positive injunctions."

"And good cause you have to tremble. There is nothing makes me more savage than the carelessness or obstinacy with which you and other foolish women—"

"Doctor! Doctor!"

"Do you expect to be called wise, then, for asking advice, and when you've got it, acting in direct opposition to it."

"No, no, that is going too far. We are not

quite so perverse. We do follow it to a certain extent."

"That is ten times worse than not following it at all. If I order you to walk to the top of yonder hill for the sake of the pure air there, do you fulfil my intention by walking only as far as the bottom of it where the fog lies."

"We are irrational delinquents, I confess."

"Mend your ways then for the future I beg."

"Oh, how delicious this breeze is, and the scent of the furze and the heath!" cried Miss Dale, as they drove rapidly across the open country; "this dear old common is the glory of the neighbourhood! I do hope there will be no more talk of enclosing it."

"You and I will protest against the barbarity of such a proceeding at all events," answered the Doctor.

"Poor Mrs. Copeland! What a boon it has been to her! At twilight, when she could no longer see to write, she would come out here and stroll by the hour, watching the evening sky and enjoying the pure air, finding peace and refreshment, as she used to tell me. And the amend-

ment in her health a few weeks after her arrival was really surprising. I do believe that, but for this unfortunate accidental illness, she would have altogether recovered. Dear doctor, is she indeed past all hope now?"

"You already know my opinion," he answered; "and assuredly the prolongation of her life, if it were possible, could be productive of no happiness to her. Let this consideration reconcile you to the stroke that is inevitable."

"When one reflects on the unhappy circumstances of her case, to wish for her life is, indeed, hardly possible. Yet there is a natural shrinking from the final parting. We were friends, doctor—friends long ago, in our young days, when we little dreamt that on either of us the breath of shame could ever fall."

"And if both had been like one, it never could have fallen. But this unfortunate friend of yours is of a very different nature to you. It has been easy enough for me to perceive that in her youth she must have been a most impetuous creature."

"Her feelings were stronger than her judg-

ment, certainly, but in that respect there was less difference between us than at this time of day you can readily imagine."

"Don't tell me that! I know your sex too well to form a false opinion of this kind. And the result bears me out;—one is disgraced, the other honoured."

"There was danger on the path of one that could not approach the other," said Miss Dale.

"It was the ungoverned nature that was the cause of the danger. *You* would have passed unscathed through the ordeal."

"It is hard to judge those who fail; and in this sad instance, compassion has seemed to me imperatively called for."

"Well, you have certainly bestowed it without stint. You are more merciful than the generality of your sex, I must acknowledge. You do not turn away your face from an erring sister; and barring a little weak sentiment, which leads you a step further than you need go, I believe after all that you are in the right."

"And you, dear doctor, in spite of the hard words you have sometimes used, how benevolent

have you been ! I can never be thankful enough for all your goodness to my unhappy friend."

"Don't talk of my goodness. Do you think I could be quite such a brute as to see suffering without endeavouring to alleviate it."

"I am sure you could not. There is no kinder heart than yours under the rough disguise it is your pleasure to wear."

"Now your imagination is at work again. There is no disguise at all. The kernel is as rough as the husk."

"I must not venture to contradict you, whatever I may know to the contrary. And here we are at home again ! A thousand thanks ! The fresh air and the pleasant companionship have done me a world of good. I shall return to my poor friend quite invigorated and better able to be of use to her, I hope."

"Don't be doing too much ! Take care of yourself ! I shall drive out here again towards night and see how matters are going on." And Miss Dale having dismounted, slashing his whip, the good Doctor drove onward.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ARE you in pain, my dear?" enquired Miss Dale a few hours later, bending over the sick bed as her poor friend uttered a low moan.

"Are you in pain?"

"Only so weak!—so weak!"

The kind watcher offered a restorative, "take this, dear love, it will revive you."

The sufferer feebly swallowed a small portion of the cordial, then fatigued by the effort turned away her head, and closing her eyes appeared to be falling into slumber, but it was not so; presently her lips moved, and there was the faint sound of some indistinct words. Miss Dale's tears dropped on the pillow as stooping over it to endeavour to catch their meaning, the low

murmurs became audible to her. The mother was apostrophising her child, forgetful of the lapse of years. "My little Anna!—My own darling! My precious one!" she softly cried; "Will you come to me? Will you come to me?" and making a feeble movement, as if to hold out her arms, a smile of ineffable love overspread her wasted countenance, but it gradually faded away, while a few tears rolled over the sunken cheeks, and soon overpowered by weakness, the eyes again closed, and a deep sleep succeeded the transitory emotion.

Miss Dale continued her solitary watch, falling into sorrowful meditation. It was evening now, and only a dim light stole into the apartment. Wearied both in body and mind she soon found confusion stealing into her train of thought, and the sense of drowsiness overpowering her; in a short time she was slumbering, but so lightly as to be conscious of the faintest sound, and from time to time aroused herself and listened for a moment as some slight noise, such as the opening or shutting of a door, a step on the staircase, or

a voice in the adjoining chamber, interrupted the silence. After one of these trifling disturbances she was again yielding to the inclination for repose, when the sound of an approaching carriage effectually dispelled her slumber. She started up on the instant and approached the window. There was just light enough to perceive that the carriage had stopped—that some one was alighting from it—that old Dame Gurney was hurrying down the little garden path.

Miss Dale softly returned to the bedside, and for a moment bent over the sleeper, then passing out of the apartment, she summoned the nurse to take her place there, and herself proceeded down stairs. Entering the little sitting room she found lights already there, and the homely tea service set out with more than ordinary care.

It was evident that the good dame had not neglected to make preparation for the expected visitor, who was now deliberately approaching the cottage doorway, and whom Miss Dale, with an agitated heart, but endeavouring to assume

some outward composure, a moment afterwards stepped forward to meet at the threshold.

Perhaps in the dim twilight the hand she extended in welcome was unperceived, for as the stranger entered there was no response to the cordial movement, nor did some gentle words of greeting receive any other notice than a slight bending of the head; but without doubt the newly arrived guest was too much overpowered by painful feeling for speech; and Miss Dale, holding sacred that silent grief, as she conceived it to be, without further address led the way into the apartment she had recently quitted, and which she now devoutly wished had been left in darkness till the first agony of the long estranged daughter on finding herself under the roof of her dying mother had, without witness, subsided.

But there was small need for such an aspiration, as on entering the little parlour Miss Dale quickly discovered^d, the light there revealing to her in the person of the visitor a stately and composed figure—a haughty and unmoved countenance. There was no suppressed sob heaving

that erect form—no struggling tears clouding that impassive gaze. No emotion of any sort was visible—the beauty of feature and complexion was marred by no irrepressible agitation—the brow was smooth, the cheek unpaled.

Calm and self-possessed, the stranger proceeded leisurely to divest herself of her mantle; then turning towards her companion with a somewhat haughty inclination of her head, in a voice that betrayed no restrained sorrow—no secret tremor:

“I am come, madam, as you perceive, at your bidding,” she said.

“I am thankful that your arrival is not altogether too late,” answered Miss Dale, “your unhappy mother still earnestly desires to see you.”

“And for what purpose?”

“She yearns to receive your pardon.”

“I have been too deeply wronged to pardon,” exclaimed Miss Copeland, with flashing eyes.

“Cruel!—cruel!” cried Miss Dale, involuntarily.

“Nay, madam, it were well to transfer your reproach from the injured daughter to the pitiless mother.”

“She has repented of her wrong—repented through years of suffering and of shame.”

“It matters not—it matters not; repentance cannot wipe out the blot of disgrace.”

“It can do more, it can atone for transgression ”

“Not in the world’s judgment,” answered Miss Copeland. “Not in the world’s judgment,” she repeated, placing herself in a half-reclining attitude on the sofa, and then, obviously unwilling to continue the discourse, superciliously as it seemed, half closing her eyes, she fell into silence.

Miss Dale, contemplating her a moment as she thus sat, was struck by the resemblance she bore to her hapless parent. The features were the same—as perfect in regularity, as refined in outline. And there was the same cast of haughtiness over the whole countenance that had in time past heightened, as some thought,

the beauty of her mother. And a creature such as this had fallen! One seemingly secure in the panoply of pride, if guarded by no more sacred armour. If hereafter tried in the same fearful ordeal would this scornful daughter pass through it unscathed? What security of immunity from a like transgression was hers? In those eyes, now downcast, but the moment before had blazed forth a fire that betrayed the nature she inherited—a nature vehement in its emotions—rebellious against discipline. And could no pity for an erring mother find place in her heart? What strange obduracy was this? But her heart was engrossed by one passion; it was filled with anger—anger against the wrong inflicted on herself; there was no room in it for pity!

From thoughts such as these passing through her mind, Miss Dale was roused by the sound of movement in the sick chamber overhead; her patient had then doubtless awakened, and the old dame at this moment entering with refreshments prepared for the visitor, she left Miss Copeland

to her homely attention, and herself hastened to the bedside of her friend.

"Why do you leave me?" faintly whispered the dying woman, as Miss Dale tenderly bent over her; "why do you leave me? I shall not long be here."

"You were sleeping, my dear, and there was some one below whom I wished to speak to."

"Some one! Who? Tell me who?" gasped Mrs. Copeland eagerly, fixing her hollow eyes searchingly on her friend's countenance.

"A visitor, dear Jane, a visitor to *me*."

"To *you*?"

"Yes, and now try to sleep again; I will watch by you the while, and nurse may go."

From sheer weakness the sufferer's eyes closed, and presently she appeared to be slumbering, but she had not long continued in this state when, without unclosing her eyes, she whispered:

"Who is it? Who is it?"

Miss Dale did not immediately reply, for she thought it possible that the words were spoken

in sleep, but they were repeated in a tone so piteous as to convince her that they were not unconsciously uttered, and she strove to frame an answer that, without fearfully agitating the unhappy lady, might yet in some measure prepare her for the announcement of her daughter's arrival.

"It is a young lady," she said presently "who knew that I was not at my own home."

"How?"

"She had heard of your illness."

"Is she gone?"

"No, she is in the parlour. I think she is somewhat fatigued; she has had a long journey; she is resting on the sofa now."

Mrs. Copeland, opening her eyes, cast an imploring gaze on her companion.

"O, Louisa," she cried; "tell me! tell me!"

"I will, my dearest, I will tell you," answered Miss Dale, soothingly folding within her own the wasted trembling hand that was put forth with a gesture of entreaty; "it is your daughter."

The dying lady feebly drew back her hand, and grasping the coverlet pulled it over her face, but the violence of her emotion could not be concealed, the bed shook with the convulsive trembling of her whole frame. Presently, however, this paroxysm of agonising agitation subsided, and uncovering her countenance, turning piteously towards her friend, she cried :

“ How shall I dare to look on her ? How shall I dare to look on her ? ”

“ Do you not wish it, my dear ? ” said Miss Dale. “ There is no need that you should see her.”

“ I must see her ; I cannot die in peace without.”

“ But not to-night, dear Jane, to-morrow perhaps you will feel better prepared for the interview.”

“ To-morrow ! There may be no to-morrow for me ! ” And she sank back gasping, on her pillow. It was not long before her eyes closed and a stupor again stole over her. This state of unconsciousness continued longer than it had

done on any former occasion, the night was far advanced before there was any symptom of returning wakefulness; and when, at last the eyes feebly unclosed, there was no evidence of the mind's taking cognizance of the objects on which their gaze languidly fell. About midnight Doctor Bassett came, but his presence seemed altogether unnoticed by his patient. As he pressed the faint and fluttering pulse, he called Miss Dale beside him, and in a low voice enquired whether Mrs. Copeland had yet seen her daughter, of whose arrival he had already been apprised; on receiving a reply in the negative he observed that she was now incapable of recognizing anyone, but that it was possible on the near approach of death her mind might be restored to a greater degree of consciousness, and that it would be advisable her daughter should then be present. In a few words Miss Dale endeavoured to make him acquainted with the state of Miss Copeland's feelings towards her unhappy mother, and expressed her own doubts as to the practicability of moderating them suf-

ficiently to prevent the presence of the daughter from being a source of additional anguish to her dying parent. But Doctor Bassett was of opinion that at all risk they should meet, and said he would himself see Miss Copeland and bid her prepare for the interview.

“And now,” added he, “I can do no more here. In a few hours all will be over. Keep up your heart; and be thankful that this poor creature’s sufferings are about to close.”

Miss Dale trembled and grew paler than before. “Is her end so very near?” she whispered fearfully.

“It is nearer than I anticipated. But how is this!” said he, taking her trembling hand, “you must not give way in this manner. If you have no more fortitude, you had better not attempt to remain here; and indeed I think I shall insist on carrying you away with me; there is no necessity for your being here, and it will be well for you to escape the pain of witnessing suffering which you cannot in any way alleviate. Come, you can be ready in five minutes!”

“Do not ask me, Doctor Bassett. It is impossible for me to consent to leave my poor friend while yet she lives.”

“Well, well, I suppose I must let you have your own way in this matter; but you will be sure to suffer from it.”

“My post is here. I cannot desert it.”

“You are a faithful creature. God bless you! Good night. I shall come again the first thing in the morning;” and the doctor passed out of the apartment.

Presently the sound of his voice reached Miss Dale from the room below, and she knew that he was in conversation with Miss Copeland. It was nearly half an hour before she heard his step on the garden path as he left the house.

Mrs. Copeland was now becoming restless; the heavy sleep had changed into broken slumber; she turned from side to side, occasionally uttering some incoherent words. Manifestly she did not recognise the kind hand that was endeavouring to smooth her pillow. Though from time to time she unclosed her eyes, it was but to cast a bewildered and terrified glance around.

Her countenance was becoming more ghastly, the sharpened features grew drawn and pinched, while a livid hue settled about the mouth, and presently a fit of convulsion came on, so violent as to alarm even the nurse; while Miss Dale, unaccustomed to so fearful a spectacle, believed that the last struggle had arrived. But the poor lady once more rallied, and after awhile became calmer and more conscious than she had been for many preceding hours. At last, however, she appeared too exhausted for speech, but after some cordial medicine had been administered to her, she revived further, and in faint accents and broken sentences she was able to converse.

“Is it nearly morning, Louisa?” she asked in a feeble voice.

“It is not yet daylight, my dear; it is hardly two o’clock.”

“And is *she* here now?”

“Yes; do you wish to see her?”

“Will she bring pardon to me? pardon and peace—pardon and peace?” murmured the dying woman, almost inaudibly.

Miss Dale wept; she could not immediately reply.

“It was a heavy wrong; but I have suffered, Louisa, I have suffered.”

“There is rest at hand, my beloved, rest from all suffering.”

“Yes, death is very near now,” she closed her eyes, and crossed her hands over her bosom.

“She is asleep, now, ma’am,” whispered the nurse, a few minutes afterwards, and Miss Dale softly stole out of the apartment, and presently entered the little parlour where sometime before she had left Miss Copeland, who was still there, stretched on the sofa and now sleeping. As she thus lay in an attitude of perfect grace, a rich shawl draping her fine form, leaving uncovered an arm and a hand of rare symmetry, that hung languidly over the edge of the couch, her head thrown back on the pillow, and the light held above her streaming fully on her faultless features, Miss Dale involuntarily paused before proceeding gently to awaken her. At the sound of her name softly pronounced, Miss Copeland

unclosed her eyes, and slowly rising from her recumbent posture, awaited in silence an explanation of her repose having been disturbed.

"You mother's end draws near," said Miss Dale with a faltering voice, "and in her intervals of consciousness she still earnestly desires to see you."

"I am ready," coldly answered Miss Copeland, deliberately rising.

"But are you prepared to carry consolation to your unhappy mother!" cried Miss Dale anxiously, pausing ere she led the way.

"I am not disposed to be questioned, madam," haughtily replied the young lady.

"Yet hear me! Her agony is great. Oh, do not add to it!"

"I must be permitted to act according to my own judgment."

Miss Dale uttered no further remonstrance. "Though I plead in vain, the sight of her hapless parent surely cannot fail to soften that obdurate heart," thought she, as they proceeded towards the sick chamber.

She paused on the threshold; and, listening,

the silence convinced her that Mrs. Copeland was still sleeping. Making a gesture of caution to her companion, she noiselessly entered the apartment. Around the sick bed the curtains were partially drawn, concealing the dying lady from their view as they passed into the chamber. Softly placing a chair for Miss Copeland behind the shadow of the curtains, Miss Dale herself proceeded to the bedside, and signing to the nurse to leave the apartment, silently took her place there. As she contemplated the countenance of the sleeper, she perceived that a change had come over it during her short absence, that the shadow of death was more visibly there. She could have believed, indeed, that life had already departed from that poor emaciated frame, but for the heaving of the chest stirring the heavy folds of the coverlid, and betraying the laboriously-drawn breath. Presently, however, there was a movement betokening consciousness; the wasted hand was feebly stretched forth, and as Miss Dale folded it tenderly within her own, there was a slight responsive pressure; and soon a faint mur-

mur escaped from the wan lips—"Will she come to me?"

"She is here now, my dearest;" and Miss Dale drawing aside the curtain, beckoned Miss Copeland to approach.

As her daughter stepped forward, the dying woman with sudden strength partially raised herself, and with an imploring gaze stretched forth her arms; but the appeal was unanswered—no yearning heart pressed itself against her own, no filial tears fell upon her neck,—and with a heavy groan the unhappy mother sank back on the pillow and buried her face from the light. It was the last effort of mental consciousness; presently the couch shook under the trembling of the limbs that were convulsed with mortal agony; and the livid countenance distorted by a fearful struggle for breath was turned towards the lamp. Involuntarily Miss Dale sank on her knees; with a shriek of horror Miss Copeland covered her face with her hands; but there came a long suffocating cry; and as it ceased she looked again on the ghastly countenance.

There was no gaze imploring forgiveness, no fond embrace proffered now,—but she fell on her mother's neck and wept aloud. Her relenting was too late.—She clasped to her heart only a lifeless form.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME months had now elapsed since the departure of Mr. Surrey, and to Mrs. Gilbert's disappointment the rooms he had occupied remained unprofitably vacant. She was beginning to fear that the scheme she had devised would prove fruitless, when one day she was agreeably surprised by the reception of a letter, which, after having read, she at once handed to Emily, observing that the proposal it contained seemed to offer precisely what they had been desiring, and she thought they could not do better than accede to it.

"I am of your opinion, mamma," answered Emily, as she concluded the perusal of the letter;

“it certainly is exactly what we have been wishing for. The name seems familiar to me—Crawford—Crawford—where can I have heard it? Oh! now I remember. It was an acquaintance of the Randalls, when I was at Southsea with them, who was talking of her young friend, Sibella Crawford. And look, mamma, this signature is S. Crawford. It certainly must be the very same person.”

“Very likely, my dear, and it may be through the Randalls that she has heard of us. You observe that she explains her application by saying she has been informed by a friend of our intention of receiving a lady into our family circle.”

“And, mamma, could anything happen more opportune—just as Mrs. Duckenfield is about to conclude her visit to us?”

“Indeed, Emily, I am not at all sure that her departure is so near at hand as you imagine.”

“She certainly does put it off from week to week in an extraordinary way; but she cannot go on in this manner for ever; and her friends in Wales are wanting her to join her little boy

there immediately. I almost wish Dr. Bassett would not make himself so agreeable to her; he has certainly consoled her for the loss of Mr. Surrey, and I do believe this new flirtation is the secret of her unwillingness to leave us."

"No doubt of it," my dear, "she cannot be content without having some folly of this sort in hand."

"The wonder is, mamma, that Doctor Bassett should be drawn into it."

"Oh, my love, men under the influence of female flattery are so weak that I am astonished at no absurdity of this sort any one of them may fall into."

"Well, I do think they degrade themselves by it."

"I suspect that with your view of affairs of this sort Mr. Surrey will never again be the favourite he was with you."

"I did like him very much, certainly; and now this foolish matter is all at an end, I dare say he would be as agreeable as ever, though it might be a little difficult to regard him quite in the same

light as heretofore. But, mamma, from all that I have heard, surely Mrs. Duckenfield was by far the most to blame. And only think of her actually finding him out in London, when she went to receive her dividends. I do wonder what could have passed at that interview."

"Nothing very flattering to her, we may be sure, as she came back so soon."

"We shall really miss her very much," remarked Emily, "for there is something loveable about her."

"To me, I must own, it will be an agreeable relief," said Mrs. Gilbert; "I do not find her so amusing as you young people do, and shall be glad to return to our old quiet ways. I hope our next guest will prove another sort of person."

"Oh, you may be quite sure of that, mamma. There cannot be two Sophy Duckenfields, search the world through."

"So much the better, my love; and for our own little world, one is one too many, in my humble opinion, at least."

"But I do believe papa is really fond of her."

“Yes, partly for the sake of old times. She was a pet of his when she was a little girl; and now her cheerful good nature covers a multitude of faults in his eyes.”

“And, after all, she is our cousin, you know, mamma.”

“True, but I am very glad there is no cousinly resemblance between you, my dear.”

“Charles rejoices in that, also,” said Emily, blushing a little; “he has really quite a dislike to her. Don’t you observe that he is studiously reserved towards her—merely ceremoniously polite. I have tried in vain to persuade him to a little more cordiality of manner: he says that he cannot conquer his contempt for her insatiable love of admiration.”

“With a mind like his, I am not surprised at the light in which he views this glaring propensity of hers, which too often eclipses all her better qualities. He is too refined—too pure in spirit to tolerate such behaviour.”

“Oh, mamma, every way how good and noble

he is! How superior to all the world beside! I can never be worthy of him!" cried Emily.

"That he may prove worthy of *you* is all we wish."

"Dear, dear mamma!" And Emily's eyes glistened.

Just afterwards, Fanny entered. She was in a more amiable mood than usual, and suggested fewer difficulties than might have been expected when Miss Crawford's letter was handed to her; and it was speedily decided that, with Mr. Gilbert's approval, the proposal it contained should, without loss of time, be acceded to.

"How often, from the quarter we least expect, good comes when most we need it," said Emily, after they had finished their discussion. "Now Miss Crawford's liberal arrangement will, I hope, remove papa's scruples as to engaging the very efficient, but expensive clerk, who has offered to take the place in the office that poor old Davis used to have. Dear old man, how faithful he was!"

"Yes, we must all honour his memory!" responded Mrs. Gilbert.

"I wish Rhoda had not witnessed his last sufferings. Dear child! it was too trying a scene for her. It seems to me, mamma, that she has never been quite well since.

"Indeed I fear she has not. It was most unfortunate that at the moment of his death she should have chanced to be with him, and alone, too! She has never described that last scene, but I cannot help suspecting the mortal agony of her poor old friend was great, from the state of fearful agitation in which she was found afterwards."

"Yet how good he was!" cried Emily. "One might have expected his death would be the most painless and peaceful."

"Yet, my dear, we know that virtue bestows no exemption from physical suffering."

"It seems to me," observed Fanny, "that the better people are, the more pain they have to bear."

"But then how nobly they do bear it!" said her sister; "with what strength of endurance! What holiness of submission!"

“Dear me!” cried Fanny, “we might fancy you were talking of the saints of old?”

“And why not of the saints of to-day,” said Emily. “For my part, I believe there are Saints on earth, always.”

“Oh! I dare say you canonize some of your paragons of perfection—Miss Dale, for instance; and Mr. Surrey, without doubt, would have been distinguished in like manner but for his late peccadillo.”

“No,” said Emily; “neither of the two you have named would be in my calendar of Saints, though I freely acknowledge that I love and honour them both.”

“Both!” exclaimed Fanny.

“Yes, take them all in all, it is impossible to do otherwise.”

“Very true, my dear,” interposed Mrs. Gilbert, “and, moreover, we owe a debt of gratitude to each of them which ought never to be forgotten. Mr. Surrey has in various ways evinced his wish to serve us; and his liberality has spared us many an inconvenience. As for good

Miss Dale, her kindly feeling towards us is always manifesting itself: her charge of our dear little Rhoda at the present time is but one of the many proofs of it."

"And undertaking this charge, with the anxiety and responsibility it entails, when so much needing care and rest herself, after all she endured through the illness and death of poor Mrs. Copeland, makes it a thousand times more kind," said Emily.

"Walter says, his sister writes word to him that Miss Copeland is more haughty than ever—keeping herself aloof from almost everybody, and that her intended marriage is for some unexplained reason suddenly broken off."

"Is Mr. Sandham himself acquainted with her?" enquired Mrs. Gilbert.

"He has met her once or twice: his father, you know, was rector of the parish in which Mr. Copeland's estate lies; and his mother and sister still live in the neighbourhood of it."

"And when are you to pay them a visit, my dear Fanny?"

"They wish me to go next week, and to stay with them till Christmas."

"That is to say, till the very eve of our losing you altogether. I think we can scarcely consent to this, my love."

"Fanny will be settled so near us that I hope it will not be like our *losing* her when she becomes Mrs. Sandham," said Emily.

"Certainly, it will not be so much of a separation as if she were going into the next county even. We cannot quite expect that a certain little pony-carriage will be as often at our door as it now is, but we shall not apprehend losing sight of it altogether."

"And you will all very often come to see us; Walter will wish it as much as I shall," said Fanny.

"I think you may be very sure that not many days will ever pass without a visit from one or other of us. Your dear father is rejoicing greatly in the thought of the near vicinity of the pretty parsonage."

"Oh, I am certain to all of us our frequent

meetings will be delightful," cried Emily. "We shall have so much to say to each other—so many little affairs to talk over when we do not actually live together."

"I sometimes think," said Fanny, "you will be all the happier here at home when that is the case."

"My dearest sister," cried Emily, clasping her arms around her; "indeed, indeed you must not think so!"

"I know I am very often a torment to you; and I can't help it—it is my unfortunate temper."

"Dear Fanny, my temper is also at fault—it is too hasty by half. But we love each other in spite of our mutual short comings, and can never believe that we shall be happier for being apart."

Fanny's tears were her only reply; and the two girls embraced each other tenderly.

"What is all this about?" exclaimed Doctor Bassett, just then suddenly entering, and taking the little party by surprise. "What is all this about—this kissing and cuddling? Is there

leave-taking going on already? Are you to be married to-morrow, young ladies?"

"Not for a great many to-morrows," answered Emily, starting up in some little confusion.

"Upon my word you are a long time preparing the wedding favour you promised to stick in my button-hole. I did not give you credit for being so wise. But you are only answering for yourself. Miss Fanny, here, will have the start of you, I'll wager."

"If you want a wedding favour on your own account, Doctor," said Fanny, "I promise to lose no time in making the very prettiest that ever was seen: it shall be all satin and silver."

"Satin and fiddlestick!" growled the Doctor. "Away with you for a mischievous little puss!" And he laughed, and looked somewhat conscious.

At this moment the door was partially opened, and Mrs. Duckenfield's fair face peered into the room.

"Shall I be in the way? Is it a medical consultation?" she enquired.

"A matrimonial one," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

“ Oh, then, of course, I must not intrude ! ”

“ Come in—come in ! ” said Doctor Bassett, advancing and taking both her hands in his ; “ come in and try if you can keep these saucy girls in order.”

And he drew her into the room.

“ Don’t be deluded by false pretences. He only wants the pleasure of your company,” cried Emily.

“ Well, I declare I consider it quite a compliment,” said Mrs. Duckenfield, seating herself.

“ My dear lady, it is a sort of compliment then that it is impossible not to offer you,” said the Doctor gallantly.

“ And I am sure it ought to be prized coming from the quarter it does,” cried Fanny.

“ Dear me ! Yes, that is everything,” responded the fair widow with a soft glance at the Doctor.

“ You seem to have a beautiful flower there,” observed he, approaching her chair more nearly, and looking at a brilliant blossom placed in her girdle. “ What conservatory have you been robbing ? ”

“Robbing indeed! As if I could be guilty of anything so shocking?”

“Only of stealing *Heartsease*,” said Fanny.

“Heartsease! Where are your eyes, young lady? This is no heartsease!” exclaimed the Doctor as, taking the flower from Mrs. Duckenfield’s fair hand, he proceeded to examine it. See here! Look at this leaf now—” but turning towards Fanny, he caught her mischievous smile, and at once apprehending her jest, stopped short in his inspection of the flower and absolutely coloured, as in confused silence, he handed it back to Mrs. Duckenfield ”

“Won’t you keep it? Do let me fasten it in your button-hole!” she cried, extending her white hand for the purpose of placing the flower there.

“Don’t make a blockhead of me!” cried the Doctor drawing back.

“Oh, what a dear delightful bear it is!” exclaimed the lady, advancing as he retreated, and still holding the flower towards him. “What a dear delightful bear it is!”

“And what a pretty sight it would be to see it led by a chain!” said Fanny; “and I do believe it might be taught to dance to a tune,” and she began humming ‘O there’s nothing half so sweet in life as love’s young dream!’

“Hush! hush! my dear,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

“Oh, by all means let the young lady amuse herself while she can! Her time for it is short,” sneered the Doctor.

“Now don’t be so cross, you dear good soul!” said Mrs. Duckenfield, looking up pleadingly into his grave face; “don’t be so cross!”

“What does it matter for a crabbed old bachelor’s being as cross as two sticks?”

“I can’t allow you to call yourself by any such horrid name: I can’t indeed.”

“Benedict is so much prettier if he could but be persuaded to adopt it,” said Fanny; “Benedict Bassett! I declare it sounds as natural as possible.”

“You are coming out quite in a new character—you are growing into a wit, Miss Fanny, under the influence of your happy prospects, but

I doubt whether your solemn betrothed will approve of the change. You had better ask his opinion on the subject I think."

"I assure you I am at liberty to say and do exactly as I please."

"And how long will that last, do you think?"

"I don't think anything on the subject," answered Fanny sharply; "but I know this, Doctor Bassett, you are fonder than anybody of saying the most ill-natured things in the world."

"Never mind about his sayings, his *doings* tell a very different story; I am sure they are always the best and kindest that can be!" cried Emily.

"You are a generous-hearted creature! You have always a good word for your friends, however little they may deserve it," said the Doctor, bending over Emily, and affectionately patting her shoulder.

"You must not make a certain young gentleman jealous," cried Mrs. Duckenfield, approaching him on the other side, and succeeding in placing the flower she had offered him in his

button-hole, "you must not make a certain young gentleman jealous. You are to be my knight and to wear my colours," and she pointed from the flower to a ribbon at her waist.

The Doctor looked a little sheepish as he cast his eyes towards the Gilberts, but smiled blandly enough on Mrs. Duckenfield, though in a gruff voice he growled forth—

"You are determined to make a fool of me, I see."

"Emily, how long is it since Mr. Surrey went!" cried Fanny, abruptly.

"A good while—some months now."

"Can't you remember exactly? Mrs. Duckenfield I dare say has a better memory."

The doctor winced a little.

"Oh, I am sure I don't know," cried the widow; "what is the use of thinking about it?"

"Suppose he should come back suddenly, now?" exclaimed Fanny, "how surprised he would be!"

"I don't think it is in his way to be much astonished about anything," quietly remarked Emily.

“And pray what right could he have to be astonished about anything here? He is not the keeper of your consciences, I presume,” snarled Doctor Bassett.

“It is the very last thing he would wish to be, I am certain, dear doctor.”

“And to be the keeper of *hearts* does not seem to be in his line either,” said Fanny.

“Stuff and nonsense about hearts! Leave him alone! Let him stick to his pen! That’s all he cares for, I’ll warrant,” cried the doctor.

“O, no! Indeed he has not such bad taste as that would be,” exclaimed Mrs. Duckenfield. “He is a great admirer of beauty, I assure you he is: and quite a ladies’ man. You have no idea how gallant he can be!”

“Ah, that is the only thing you thoughtless creatures care about! An honest fellow may be ready to give body and soul for you, but if he has not the knack of fine words he may as well go to the right about at once, for he will be sure to find no favour with you.”

Mrs. Duckenfield’s eyes very eloquently con-

tradicted this assumption of the doctor's, but she only said, with a smile that displayed to advantage her pearly teeth,—

“How droll you are!”

“Droll!” he repeated, “I was never more serious in my life. It's true to the letter: and you know it.”

“Well, it is not true in my own case, at all events, for I declare I think a plain sensible man, plain in manner I mean—”

“Never mind the parenthesis!” interrupted the Doctor, “out with it—say a plain man at once, without more ado. Well, what is it you think about a plain man?” continued he in something of an under tone.

“I think he may be the most loveable man in the world,” murmured the lady. “But I don't give up the parenthesis.”

“I wish I could believe you. But you are deceitful—every one of you—and have no better sport than making fools of us,” whispered the Doctor.

“You are unjust to be so hard upon us.”

“Unjust am I? Shall I bring chapter and verse in proof of what I say? Have not you pronounced sentence of banishment against the philosopher, as they call him here?”

Mrs. Duckenfield coloured. “What makes you have such an idea as that,” she said.

“How could I have any other? But I did not come here to idle away all my time in this manner,” he continued in a louder tone; “I only looked in to see if any of you would like a drive this fine fresh morning. I am going on my country round, and can set you down and take you up again at some one of your houses of call, if either of you has a mind to accompany me so far.”

“If you will pass the Briars?—” began Emily, but she stopped short, for Mrs. Duckenfield was declaring that she should of all things be delighted to have a drive that very morning, in order to pay a visit,—a *farewell* visit, she said, —about two miles off.

“Get your cloak and bonnet at once then,” said the Doctor. “Make haste! I have no time to lose.”

“ Oh, I will be ready in five minutes.” And the fair lady vanished.

“ Shall you see our little Rhoda to-day, Doctor Bassett?” enquired Mrs. Gilbert.

“ To be sure. I shall take the Briars on my way back.”

“ You thought the dear child really improved on your last visit?”

“ Decidedly. That excellent creature, Miss Dale, has gone just the right way to work: and Rhoda is as happy as a queen with her. You will have the child back with you before long as well as ever she was.”

“ Thank God! And thank you too, dear Doctor!”

“ Me! You have nothing to thank me for, but my sending the child away from you.”

“ Which we thought very cruel at the time,” interposed Emily.

“ Weren’t you all killing her by your over-much anxiety?—Watching her every moment of the day and night—and frightening yourselves out of your senses whether she laughed or cried.”

“But she really was in a very sad state.”

“She would have been in a much sadder state. I can assure you, if I had allowed you to have your own way with her, and to keep her at home. You thought I carried my point with too high a hand, I know, when I insisted on taking her away from you: but it was the only thing to save the child. That eternal anxiety about her, which none of you had the wit to conceal, aggravated all the worst symptoms of her case and made her recovery more doubtful than you had any suspicion of.”

Emily was in tears by this time: “Dear Doctor Bassett, will our darling eventually be spared to us?—will she grow up to be a woman?”

“I am no prophet, but as far as I can see, there is now no doubt of her becoming a woman, and the best woman of you all too. You have only to leave her to herself—let her mind have its own bent, and see what nature will do for her.”

Emily smiled through her tears, “Nature

seems to be making her very lovely now," she said.

"Yes, I suspect that after all, this little sister of yours will prove the flower of the flock; in spite of the bright eyes and roses that just at present you may hear so much about, young ladies."

The two girls blushed, and Mrs. Gilbert smiled, "Ah, this is their day of triumph," she cried, "but I hope it will lead them to happiness that will out-last youth and beauty."

Doctor Bassett became silent and sat awhile looking extremely grave and thoughtful; but at last suddenly starting up, "Upon my word this matrimony is a most serious business to consider," he abruptly exclaimed.

Emily laughed outright. "Dear Doctor," she cried, "if you were not the obstinate bachelor you are, we might almost suspect it was on your own account, no less than your friends, that you have been so gravely meditating the subject."

She had spoken at random and was surprised at the effect her words produced; Doctor Bassett

looked extremely confused and attempted no manner of answer. He became restless—sat down—quickly rose up again—walked towards the window—then approached the table at which Mrs. Gilbert and her daughters sat at their work, and taking up a book that lay there, began rapidly turning over the pages and, without raising his eyes from the volume, presently impatiently exclaimed, “How long am I to be kept waiting here I wonder?”

“Emily, my love, see if your cousin Sophy is nearly ready,” said Mrs. Gilbert.

But, at this moment, Mrs. Duckenfield, most becomingly attired, made her appearance, exclaiming,—“My dear Doctor, I fear I must have exhausted your patience, but you have no idea how my Indian habits cling to me, and how utterly impossible I find it to hurry myself: and what with one’s shawls, and one’s furs, and one’s boots,” she added, slightly raising her rich sweeping robe, and displaying for an instant the prettiest little foot delicately encased in closest-fitting kid; “one’s boots, that take so long in being

laced, you know, really it is quite a tedious affair to prepare for an out-of-door excursion."

Doctor Bassett's grave countenance relaxed into a smile, and there was no mistaking the glance of more than admiration he fixed on the lady, but he only said,—“Well, you are ready at last, I see. Come along then!” and hastily nodding to the Gilberts, he ran down-stairs, leaving Mrs. Duckenfield to follow. His old-fashioned gig was in waiting at the house-door, and presently he was carefully assisting the fair widow to mount it. As they drove off, Emily turned from the window whence she had been observing their departure, and with uplifted hands exclaimed, in a tone of unfeigned astonishment,—“Doctor Bassett! and Mrs. Duckenfield! Isn't it wonderful?”

CHAPTER X.

CHARLES RANDALL was still at home on half-pay, and notwithstanding his chivalrous devotion to his profession, and his desire of promotion, he could not but enjoy this lull in his restless life—this escape from the narrow bounds of ship-board society. He delighted also in the tranquil leisure that afforded opportunity for studies he always pursued with zest, and in the quiet home of his parents, their simple habits and monotonous tone of life, he found a refreshing contrast to the hazards and excitements inseparable from his professional career. But, above all, in the companionship of Emily Gilbert he experienced a delicious peace that his heart had long yearned

for. She was at last bound to him by the tie of betrothal, and his future was brightened by the one hope that now shone steadfastly before him. Very blissful were their woodland rambles, their sunset lingerings, their strolls in the quiet garden, when the moonbeams glanced on Emily's sleeping flowers. But these happy meetings, if they superseded the neighbourly visit, or the social ramble, to which, heretofore, the leisure hour had been most commonly devoted, encroached in no degree on the time habitually dedicated by Emily to the fulfilment of her various home duties. Neither did they deprive the parents of the young officer of a fair share of the society of the son of whom they were so justly proud; nor diminish the eagerness with which, after his long enforced absence from the pursuit of literature, he returned to the study of the choice collection of books that was the only heirloom his impoverished father possessed, and that, to say truth, was but little prized by its present somewhat indolent owner.

Thus rationally, and not the less felicitously,

the young lovers pursued their course, their happiness, if possible, enhanced by the sanction and approval of their mutual friends. In the present state of affairs, however, it was deemed advisable that their marriage should be deferred, but if Charles Randall should be re-appointed to active service, and thus become placed in the way of promotion, it was decided that Emily should at once become his wife; and the young people felt that when their parting became inevitable, it would be less anxious to bear if they were bound together by a tie, holy and indissoluble as that of marriage.

Fanny Gilbert was now on a visit to the family of Mr. Sandham, residing in a distant county; and it had been agreed that on her return home, her union with the young clergyman should almost immediately take place. She had of late, under the influence of auspicious love, become far more amiable in the domestic circle, and Mrs. Gilbert was beginning to feel that there would be some pain in having that circle narrowed, even by Fanny's removal from it; while

to the prospect of its being still further diminished by the loss of her favourite Emily, she could not look forward without an amount of sorrow that she acknowledged to be selfish, but strove in vain to overcome.

Mr. Gilbert, on the contrary, painfully conscious that he could himself make no adequate provision for his children, considered with unmixed satisfaction that the marriages determined on would insure for two, at least, of his beloved daughters homes of their own; and with this view of approaching events, his anxieties, as a matter of course, sensibly diminished. He had also at present another, though minor cause of satisfaction. Sir James Dalton, glad of any opportunity, however indirect of testifying his sense of gratitude to Mr. Surrey, and aware that his friend was not only in some way a family connection of the Gilberts, but also that he felt a lively interest in their welfare had, on quitting England, given instructions for some affairs of his own requiring legal supervision, to be entrusted to the management of Mr. Gilbert, whose

reputation for integrity was already known to him. In consequence of this unexpected piece of good fortune, the honest lawyer's office now wore a tolerably thriving aspect, and, in the place of poor old Davis, could boast of the presence of more than one thoroughly efficient clerk in full occupation; notwithstanding that the diligence of Mr. Gilbert himself and his son Andrew in no wise relaxed. But about this time the Gilberts had yet another occasion for thankfulness. Tidings reached them of Edmund's voyage having been safely accomplished, and of his career in New Zealand being favorably commenced. The repentant prodigal wrote in a strain of manly sorrow for his past misdeeds and of brave resolution to persevere in a good course for the future. Many were the tears of joy that fell over the precious letter, as it passed from one to another of the family circle, but Emily's flowed with the deepest tenderness, and her heart was unsatisfied till in the freedom of solitude she had fallen on her knees and poured out her gratitude to Heaven.

To no one of their friends was the returning prosperity of the Gilbert family a subject of more sincere rejoicing than to Miss Dale; and to the tender and judicious care she had recently bestowed on the darling of them all—little Rhoda, was owing, as indeed they were gratefully conscious, a large share of their present happiness. The dear child was now restored to them in a very satisfactory state of health, blooming in appearance, and equable in cheerfulness. There was no longer occasion to check her ardour in the pursuit of knowledge by depriving her of books, for books now claimed no undue share of her attention: in a new interest that she had acquired she turned for information to a simpler and truer source, and in her own way was making herself acquainted with some of the most subtle of nature's laws, as seemingly careless she rambled hour after hour in the open fields, unconsciously imbibing fresh vigour of mind and body with each breath of the free air that she inhaled.

Doctor Bassett's visits were not necessary now,

and to say the truth, they had become of somewhat rare occurrence since Mrs. Duckenfield's departure, which at last had absolutely taken place and, contrary to Emily's expectation, without any further light being thrown on the state of affairs between them. But the Doctor certainly looked not a little conscious whenever the fair widow chanced to be mentioned in his presence, and about this time also on more occasions than one, evinced some shyness of the Gilberts' society: he said that he was unusually busy, but they knew very well that there was no remarkable amount of sickness prevailing; and he appeared to have leisure enough on his hands for some purposes. Over and over again as they passed his house, they found him deliberately pacing to and fro the pavement in front of it, critically observing the progress of carpenters and painters, who were at work on a small balcony that was being thrown out before his principal sitting-room, and on new window frames that were everywhere displacing the old fashioned ones that had hitherto somewhat disfigured his

abode. A little later, however, when the labours of the workmen seemed concluded, the Gilberts for a short time altogether lost sight of Doctor Bassett.

Not only had they no visits from him, but they nowhere encountered him on their rambles. When suddenly he again made his appearance, he told them that he had been running out of the way of new paint and plaster that he had been forced to furbish up his old house with, to prevent its crumbling about his ears, and without mentioning to what particular place he had gone, said that he had been having a taste of sea water and was come back as salt as a herring. He looked all the better for his excursion, and now had a smiling nod or a pleasant word for his friends on accidentally meeting them, but the sociable chat of old, from some cause or other, he continued to eschew.

Mrs. Duckenfield corresponded with the Gilberts, but they had not very recently heard from her. In her last letter she mentioned the delicate state of her little boy's health and that she

had been recommended to give him sea-bathing, consequently that she thought of visiting a small watering place on the Welch coast; but this plan not being absolutely decided when she wrote they had expected further tidings, which had not yet however reached them.

The season was now delightful and the country about Woodridge, touched with the glory of autumn, wore an aspect of beauty that redeemed the usual tameness of its scenery. The air became fresh, and clouds of pillowy softness, some dark as night, some of silvery brightness, in fantastic and ever changing form, careered rapidly along, skimming the fixed azure height and chequering with their flying shadows the wide, still fields that lay between the red and golden-tinted woods.

On one of the lengthened rambles that the pleasantness of the weather tempted even Mrs. Gilbert, with Rhoda for her companion, to indulge in, their way home led by the Briars, and they could not pass Miss Dale's door without entering, but the artist was so intent on the

completion of a picture that she could only entreat them to rest and amuse themselves with her portfolios. Mrs. Gilbert glad of repose, threw herself into an easy chair, and Rhoda, with some stray papers that had caught her attention, pen and ink pictures, as she termed them, presently seated herself at her feet, and proceeded to read aloud some fragmentary poems.

“How vivid are the descriptions!” exclaimed Mrs. Gilbert, in a pause of the reading. “I seem, while listening, to be rambling once more in the dear old haunts.”

“Which the memory of our youth keeps fresh to us for ever,” said Miss Dale, looking up from her painting: “winter after winter has stripped bare the woods and fields that we have since looked on, but of those early paths not a leaf has fallen, not a blade of grass has withered.”

CHAPTER XI.

THOUGH the weather continued for some time delightful, Mrs. Gilbert and her daughters found little further opportunity for the enjoyment of it in country rambles, being occupied in making hasty preparation for the reception of Miss Crawford, who, on receiving a favourable answer to her application, had announced her intention of going to them almost immediately.

“I wonder what she will be like,” said Rhoda, as on the evening of her expected arrival, in the pleasant apartment that had been called Mr. Surrey’s, she assisted Emily in arranging the folds of some warm window curtains that had just replaced the lighter summer drapery, “I wonder what she will be like.”

“Charles says very little about her,” returned her sister, “though I find he was once staying in her father’s house, but that was years ago, when he was at Trinidad, where he was so ill of fever, as you may remember we heard.”

“Oh, then I suppose it is he who has persuaded her to come to us.”

“No, indeed; he was astonished to hear of her application. He has never seen her since he left the West Indies.”

“I dare say it will be pleasant to have her here, but I do wish Mr. Surrey were coming instead; don’t you Emily?”

“I think just now he is enjoying his travels in Germany or Switzerland, or some beautiful country, so we ought hardly to be sorry that he is not returning to us.”

“How different this room looked when he was in it, with all his books and papers lying about in what Fanny used to call ‘such untidy confusion,’” said Rhoda. “It is nicer and prettier now, certainly, but somehow I liked the look of it better then.”

“What! than with this beautiful little piano in it, Rhoda?”

“Well, I am glad Miss Crawford has sent that piano, for it shows she is musical, and I dare say she is very clever besides, for that great heavy box that is come must be filled with books.”

“Let us lay one or two of our own books on the reading table,” said Emily; and Rhoda in answer to this suggestion drew from the book-shelf a dusky looking little volume containing “The Traveller,” and “The Deserted Village,” of Goldsmith, and a well worn octavo, “The Sketch-book” of Washington Irving.

“And not this?” said Emily, pointing to a small volume on the back of which was inscribed, “Dramas.”

“No,” answered Rhoda, “he put it in that dark corner on purpose.”

“What a conscientious little friend you are!”

“But we must not forget what will look pleasanter than books; I will fill this presently,” said Rhoda, placing on the table a small vase.

“Mr. Surrey, however, would say a single

flower was sufficient. Don't you remember the one fresh rose in this glass he was so fond of having on his writing table?"

"Yes, and I remember also who used every morning to give him the one fresh rose."

Rhoda smiled a little sorrowfully; "I wish he and the roses were not gone now," she said.

"Summer will come back to us, and Mr. Surrey too, we will hope, one of these days, my little sister."

"We shall be very happy then," said Rhoda, skipping out into the garden, whence she returned with a few choice geranium blossoms.

The short autumnal twilight had faded away before the sisters had concluded putting the finishing touches to the preparations for the expected guest, but at length all was complete, and the little room was the picture of comfort. The full folds of the warm-tinted curtains were drawn closely over the darkened windows; the well-trimmed lamp was brought in, a clear fire glowed in the low grate, and the large cushioned chair, rich with the embroidery of Fanny, was

drawn towards the hearth. A few simple ornaments were placed here and there, and on the chimney-piece was the quaint little clock, with what Rhoda called its friendly looking face telling in old fashioned characters the progress of the hours; and above, set in an antique frame of curiously carved wood, was a small bright mirror that just now reflected the rosy smile of Emily, whose colour deepened as she watched the movement of the minute hand of the clock; the door of the apartment opening almost on the instant betrayed the cause of her heightened bloom; Charles Randall entered and eagerly hastening forward folded in a fond clasp the dear hand, whose gentle pressure he rarely failed each evening to claim at the precise hour which the faithful little monitor was now cheerfully chiming.

“See,” he said, drawing Emily to the window and putting aside the curtain; “see what an enchanting night it is! Come and enjoy it in the garden. Throw a warm shawl over head and shoulders, and take a five minutes’ walk with me.”

Emily smiled her assent; and presently, with a soft woollen plaid wrapped closely round her, and leaning on her lover's arm, stepped out upon the quiet lawn.

How beautiful the scene! The glorious full moon appeared slowly rising above some tall trees, not far distant, whose topmost branches, swaying to and fro as the soft wind listed, caught fitful splendour: their rustling foliage now all darkness, now all bathed in glittering light.

“How wonderfully lovely!” cried Emily.

Her companion uttered no response, but his deep, still gaze was more expressive than words, and he was so long silent that, but for the caressing movement detaining her hand within his clasp, Emily might have suspected that he had become unconscious of her presence.

As he led her back to the house he lingered on the threshold and looked fondly into her eyes, but declined her invitation to enter; he was in no mood for other companionship than hers, and they parted at the doorway, but not before the

hand he reluctantly resigned had been closely pressed to his lips.

Emily was all blushes as she rejoined her sister, and her rosy beauty peeping out from the plaid that hood-wise sheltered her head, caused Rhoda to exclaim that she looked quite a picture. She laughingly threw off her wrap, and smoothing the soft hair it had ruffled, proposed that they should now go to the drawing-room.

They found Mrs. Gilbert already there, occupying her accustomed corner of the comfortable old-fashioned sofa, and busy with her wool-work; whilst the neat-handed Janet was completing the somewhat elaborate arrangements of the tea-table. Presently Mr. Gilbert came in for a moment to bid Rhoda be on the watch for the coach, and tell him of its arrival that he might hand the fair traveller out. There was a chorus of thanks. "It would be just the proper thing for the master of the house to be the first to offer a welcome to the new guest—and it was so considerate in him to have thought of it—he was always so kind." But before half these com-

mendations had been uttered the good lawyer was in his office again.

Soon afterwards there was a step on the stairs, the sound of which, though of late it had become less familiar than formerly, was at once recognised by the little party in the drawing-room. Rhoda flew forward to open the door, and as Doctor Bassett entered, his welcome appearance was greeted by sundry expressions of friendly cordiality, but without answering them he stopped short in the middle of the room, and looking with astonishment at the profusely spread table exclaimed, "What is the meaning of all this? Can't you be content with simple bread and butter at this time of day?"

"If we had had no dinner we should be glad of something else, I fancy," answered Emily, "and we are expecting a guest who has very likely missed hers."

"You have not heard perhaps that a young lady is coming to take up her abode with us," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Not I, indeed! and how in the name of

reason, can you be in such a hurry to encumber yourselves with a torment of that sort again?"

"Oh, Doctor Bassett! if our last visitor could but hear you!" cried Emily.

"Well, suppose she could, what then?"

"What disgrace you would fall into."

"Not a bit of it. She's a good-natured soul."

"We cannot imagine the reason of our not hearing from Mrs. Duckenfield," said Mrs. Gilbert, "she has not written to us since she talked of going to the sea."

"She has had something besides letter writing to think of; you don't know perhaps the anxiety she has been in about her child."

"He has not been ill again, I hope?"

"He has been within an inch of the grave, but he is going on pretty well now."

"Dear Doctor, then you have actually been to see him!" cried Emily.

"To be sure I have."

"And without telling us anything about it."

"I have had something else to do than to come and gossip."

"But do tell us now, how is Mrs. Duckenfield herself?"

"Oh, she is getting over her fright and growing as lively as ever."

"It must be very inconvenient to you to go such an immense distance," observed Mrs. Gilbert.

"Perhaps in consideration of it," said Emily, with an arch smile, "Mrs. Duckenfield might be persuaded to take up her abode without loss of time, where all such difficulty in the way of seeing your little patient would be entirely obviated."

"What, you want to have her here again, do you?" said he.

"Oh, no, dear Doctor, there is another house that must be quite ready for her reception, I am sure, with its new balcony and new windows, and all the fine furniture, that—rumour says—has been carried into it during the last week!"

“You are a mischief-loving puss, Miss Emily, and rumour is an old busybody!”

“And you look very guilty, Doctor, I declare I can detect something like a blush on your cheek.”

“A fiddlestick!” he exclaimed, turning away from her smiling glance, and walking briskly towards the door.

“Oh, you are not going, dear Doctor!” cried Emily.

“Not going, indeed! Havn’t you done your best to drive me away?”

“I think she has been a little too hard upon you,” said Mrs. Gilbert; “though I must confess some of our neighbours seem to be pretty much of her opinion.”

“And what is their business? I should like to know,” said the Doctor, stalking back and standing erect on the hearth-rug; “what is their business to have any opinion at all on the subject! Can’t a poor bachelor be allowed once in seven years to set his house in order without having all the foolish tongues in the town set wagging?”

“Ah, to be sure!” cried Emily; “and when a piano is carried into his house, it might be innocently imagined that the poor bachelor has possessed himself of it with the view of improving his solitary hours by the practice of thorough bass.”

The Doctor laughed outright.

“You are a malicious young witch!” he exclaimed; “but don’t fancy yourself too wise!”

Emily, smilingly, shook her head at him.

“It is of no use to throw dust in our eyes, you can’t keep us quite in the dark,” she said.

“Ah! you are a true daughter of Eve. You must try to satisfy your curiosity. You had better by half take a lesson from this silent little woman,” he said, approaching Rhoda, “she is wiser than her elders; she does not trouble herself about other people’s concerns, does she?” he continued, stroking caressingly the glossy locks of his young favorite.

“Is not she looking well?” cried Mrs. Gilbert.

“Well, yes, to be sure she is. But what is she sitting as still as a mouse for?”

"I am listening for the coach," answered Rhoda.

"By which," said Emily, "the branch railway not yet being open, we are expecting our visitor to arrive."

"You are, are you? I'm off then," and seizing his hat the Doctor hastily departed.

CHAPTER XII.

It was not long before the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and Rhoda flew down stairs to give the promised summons. Mrs. Gilbert, who was feeling some little nervous trepidation as the moment approached for the reception of the new guest, detained Emily beside her, and hardly had she succeeded in attaining her ordinary composure when, conducted by Mr. Gilbert, the stranger entered the drawing-room. At the instant of her introduction the large shawl and thick veil she wore afforded but an indistinct view of her face and figure. That she was of low stature and graceful in movement was alone perceptible, but her words were so courteous, and her tone of voice so melodious, that the idea

conceived of her could not fail to be favorable; and when, after adjourning to her chamber, in order to disencumber herself of her travelling costume, she rejoined the family party, her appearance was in harmony with the manner that had so agreeably impressed them. Beautiful, however, she was not, for her features were distinguished by no remarkable symmetry, and her complexion was of somewhat dusky hue, but her countenance was expressive of vivacity and intelligence, and her small figure was perfect in its delicate proportions.

An air of almost severe simplicity characterized her toilette. Her abundant jet black hair, compressed into the smallest possible compass, and smoothly wound behind the ear, was twined at the back of the head into a single shining knot; and a small snow white collar encircling her slender throat was the only relief to the dun coloured robe she wore, whose soft folds betrayed each movement of her graceful form. The perfect ease of her manner was remarkable in one so young as she appeared to be, and quickly

produced the agreeable effect of banishing the slight embarrassment which at first, naturally enough, the Gilberts had felt, and in some measure evinced, in their reception of a complete stranger. Miss Crawford at once glided into the position accorded to her in their domestic circle, and now as they all gathered round the tea-table, the conversation fell into as social a vein as if the newly-arrived guest had long been accustomed to a place there. Whatever topic was touched upon she readily took part in it, with a grace and vivacity that was truly charming, while her countenance, varying with each change in the tone of discourse, now lighted up with gaiety, now melted into pensiveness, appeared inexpressibly fascinating. The Gilberts were enchanted. What a delightful addition had they made to their quiet home party! Even Fanny, on her return, could not fail to be pleased with so attractive a companion. How happy was the chance that had brought to them so desirable an inmate!

Such were the gratulations that burst forth

after Miss Crawford had retired for the night, and Mr. Gilbert, who had been beguiled into spending his whole evening in the drawing-room, and Andrew, who had shyly made his appearance there within the last half hour, both heartily responded to the encomiums lavished on the fair visitor. It was determined by general consent that her society was a most valuable acquisition to the domestic circle.

The following day fully confirmed the favourable opinion that had been formed of the new guest. Her pleasant courtesy of manner and the satisfaction she expressed in all the arrangements that had been made for her accommodation were extremely gratifying. Above all things she was delighted with the apartment assigned to her as a private sitting room, of which on the previous evening she had taken but a cursory glance owing, she said, to the attraction of the social circle in the drawing room—an attraction that she felt would often entice her from her solitude.

The large box, the arrival of which had pre-

ceded that of Miss Crawford, was now, by her desire, brought into the apartment that she requested might still retain the name of the study, and there, on its being opened, greatly to the delight of Rhoda, who had been invited to assist in the task of unpacking, it was found to contain a large number of books, chiefly of modern publication, and such as hitherto had not fallen in the way of the Gilberts. To arrange these volumes on the bookshelves was a delightful occupation, leading, as it did, to much pleasant discourse.

There was also a package of music to assort, and the piano to make trial of, and Miss Crawford, sitting down to the instrument, after rapidly running over the keys and executing a brilliant prelude with the skill of a practised musician, played softly a deeply plaintive air with an intense pathos that went to the heart of her little companion, whose eyes as she listened were suffused with irrepressible tears.

The morning had slipped away quickly with these various occupations, and there had been no

temptation to go out of doors, for the weather was cloudy and cheerless; but, as the day advanced, the sky became partially clear, and a sudden gleam of sunlight drew Rhoda to the window. The garden was looking pleasant now; a shower had lately fallen, its drops were still glistening on the leaves and flowers; and a black-bird on the grassplot immediately beneath the window, his plumage shining, was, with his golden bill, piercing the softened earth. From a near shrubbery there came at intervals the fitful and plaintive note of a robin, and from a distance was heard the hoarse, monotonous murmur of a colony of rooks: there was no other sound, except of the soft wind that in uncertain gusts was, now stormily swinging to and fro the pliant branches sheltering the garden, now leaving them motionless.

Rhoda, who had thrown open the window, stood there looking and listening in a manner that was her own, her hands folded together, her slender neck slightly bent, and from time to time a soft flush stealing into her cheeks. Miss

Crawford, who had silently approached, observed the young dreamer's abstraction, and smiled. But the expression of her countenance changed as her attention was presently attracted in another direction. Emily, in her gardening attire—a wide straw hat, and a loose dress confined at the waist by a broad black girdle, carrying a coarse basket and her large pruning scissors—was walking lightly along a side-path of the garden; she stopped as she came before a spreading acacia, and reached upwards in an attempt to seize hold of a branch from which was depending a withered spray.

She appeared very attractive as she thus stood with her free attitude and in her careless attire, her charming face sheltered, but not concealed, by the wide brim of the straw hat, and the fresh wind, as it swept by, added new bloom to her fair and rounded cheek. She had just succeeded in catching hold of the swinging branch when at the sound of advancing footsteps her colour deepened and a fond smile brightened her countenance. There was a

tender response to her sweet greeting, and presently Charles Randall was assisting the fair gardener.

Proceeding with their tasks, as together they bent over the autumnal flowers, the sound of their happy voices was distinctly audible at the study window, although the speakers were no longer in view of it. Rhoda, turning at length towards her companion, was startled by perceiving the excessive palor of her countenance; not only were her cheeks colourless, but her lips were absolutely livid, and trembling from some secret emotion, while her intensely dark eyes betrayed an expression from which her young associate involuntarily shrank, and intuitively felt was not intended for her observation. Gliding quietly away from her place at the window, Rhoda resumed her arrangement of the books, and after lingering a short time over her occupation, without having a word addressed to her, silently quitted the room.

Late in the evening of the same day the family party, with their new guest, were assembled in

the drawing-room, the ladies busy with their needle work, and Mr. Gilbert and Andrew disposing of a half hour's leisure by enjoying a chat with them. It was a cheerful little company; there was much pleasant talk; an amusing anecdote had been cleverly related by Miss Crawford that had drawn forth many a lively remark and peals of gay laughter. In the midst of this mirth Randall entered.

A visit from him at about this hour was so customary, and Miss Crawford already seemed to the Gilberts so completely one of themselves that, on the appearance of the young officer, he was accosted merely by manifold exclamations of regret that he had just lost a most entertaining story. But he seemed scarcely to hear the vivacious remarks that were made, and without, as had hitherto been his custom, going at once towards Emily, now merely suffered his glance to rest on her for an instant, as with an air of some uncertainty, and a graver countenance than usual, he silently approached the little circle. The jest and laughter prevailing did not prevent the

sound of his own name, pronounced in a low soft tone that long ago was familiar to him, from reaching his ear, although they diverted observation from the embarrassment that his manner betrayed as he drew near to Miss Crawford and met the warm pressure of the hand she extended to him. After a few words, inaudible to the rest of the company, Randall, withdrawing to a little distance, seated himself near Emily, and Miss Crawford bent over her embroidery, but she made little progress in her task; her hand trembled violently, and from time to time there flashed from under her dark brows a glance, strange as that which had startled Rhoda in the morning, and furtively directed towards the lovers. Her emotion was, however, unobserved; Mr. Gilbert was relating a remarkable history that engrossed the attention of all present but herself, and by the time he had concluded his recital, Miss Crawford had recovered her outward composure. Afterwards, on a pause of the conversation that had again become general, rising from her place at the work table she sat down

before the piano and commenced a grand piece of Mendelsohn's; music, such as hers had been seldom heard in that little drawing-room. Infused with the power of genius, its influence over the feelings was irresistible; one by one her auditors fell into absorbed attention, and Charles Randall in his abstraction leaned over the bowed head of the performer, unmindful for the moment of every other being. When the air with its elaborate variations was ended Miss Crawford at once rose, and turning to leave the piano, bestowed on Randall a look which he could not avail encountering, and that caused him a sensation of uneasiness. It was her farewell glance to him for that evening. Immediately afterwards she retired to her chamber.

As the days passed on, Miss Crawford appeared to attach herself particularly to Emily, accompanying her frequently on her walks, taking part in the care of her flowers, enticing her to spend part of every morning in the quiet little study, by undertaking to read there aloud one or other of the choice books she possessed;

and in short eagerly seeking her society on every possible occasion. It followed as a matter of course that Randall was often in the company of Miss Crawford. Indeed, he could scarcely see Emily without being so. If, at first, this had been irksome to him, it soon ceased to be so. The embarrassment he had felt, quickly wore off, and the society he prized above that of all others was not less enjoyed by him because now it was to be found where he could give fuller play than heretofore to his intellectual taste, and where music lent its powerful charm. If the social atmosphere surrounding his betrothed had become altered, it seemed to him only as the new setting of the gem, a graceful novelty attracting his admiration, but by no means lessening his value for the jewel itself. Indeed, Emily had never appeared to him to more advantage than now in the contrast she presented to her new companion. Her fresh beauty, her simple manner, and her eminently useful accomplishments, lost none of their charm through being viewed side by side with attractions of a totally opposite order, although the

young officer fully appreciated the intellectual capacity and the many graceful acquirements of Miss Crawford, and could not be utterly unconscious of the meaning of a glance flashing from her dark eyes that from time to time was secretly directed towards him,—a glance like that which had bewildered him when, a mere stripling and in a distant land, he lay languid and helpless on a sick couch.

A few years back Charles Randall, then a very young officer on a short leave of absence from his ship, at that time lying off Trinidad, availed himself of the opportunity of making use of a letter of introduction from his father to a Mr. Crawford, a wealthy merchant of the island; and proceeding to his estate a little distance from the coast, was joyfully welcomed as the son of an old friend and schoolmate of that gentleman. Grati-
fied by the cordiality of his reception, young Randall readily accepted the invitation that was warmly pressed on him to make Mr. Crawford's house his home whilst on shore, and at once taking up his abode there found himself domesti-

cated with the daughter of his host, a young lady recently returned from completing her education in England, and who had reached the age of sixteen, although the remarkable smallness of her figure gave to her appearance, on a first view, the aspect of a mere child. But it needed only a second glance to perceive that the intellect and the feelings of the *woman* were already awakened. The bending of the dusky brow, the flashing of the dark eye told no child's thoughts; there was a subtle brain at work, and a passionate heart beating, if the expression of that speaking countenance might be rightly interpreted, and the young sailor's attention was at once arrested by the intellect and the ardour betrayed in the glances of the little creole.

He had not been long under the same roof with her before he became conscious that she was in no ordinary measure attracted towards himself. He could not but observe that at his slightest notice her countenance lighted up with vivid joy, that her voice sank to a tremulous softness in replying to his most ordinary observation, that her

watchful eyes followed his movements, that her slight hand trembled at his touch. And perhaps these indications of newly awakened feeling might have sunk deeply into his heart, if already it had not been pre-occupied, if the image of Emily Gilbert had not been impressed there.

But, though faithful to an affection that he secretly cherished, the society of Sibella Crawford had a powerful charm for him. Her grace of movement, her ardent manner perpetually arresting his attention, involuntarily caused his thoughts to hover round her, while her musical genius, seizing hold of his imagination, drew him towards her with an attraction yet more potent.

That the young lady should mistake the interest and admiration she excited for the homage of the heart was the almost natural result of her ignorance of any prior attachment on the part of Randall, and with all the warmth and impetuosity that characterised her impulsive nature, she bestowed on him unhesitatingly the full measure of a first and ardent love.

Whether Mr. Crawford was in ignorance of the new feelings awakened in the breast of his daughter, or that being conscious of them and approving the direction which her affections had taken, he was disposed tacitly to encourage her preference for the son of his old friend,—certain it is that he placed no constraint upon the freedom of intimacy that, very soon after their first acquaintance, was established between the young people, who indulged hour after hour in the pleasure of uninterrupted companionship, while the merchant was occupied at his counting-house, where as a matter of course he spent the greater part of the day.

The young sailor's short leave of absence was on the point of expiring, when he was suddenly seized with the fever incidental to the climate, and at once rendered utterly prostrate by the severity of the attack, was unable to take any steps towards effecting his removal from the house of Mr. Crawford, though on more than one account earnestly desiring to do so, notwithstanding the strenuous opposition of his friendly

host. There was no alternative for him, therefore, and stretched now on the bed of sickness, and sedulously tended where lately he had been gaily and luxuriously entertained, he could but resign himself to his suffering condition with a feeling of thankfulness for the care lavished on his helpless state.

The young Sibella, who knew no mother's care and who exercised the authority of a mistress in her father's household, skilfully directed the various arrangements essential to the comfort of the sufferer, and with the devotion of a loving woman bent over his pillow, and with her own hands cooled his burning brow and administered to him the remedies prescribed by an experienced physician.

But the patient had soon become unconscious of these tender assiduities, and in the delirium of fever, his rambling fancy carrying him back over the ocean and bringing him into the beloved presence, he was perpetually invoking one sweet name,—the name of *Emily*—his secret was betrayed, and with a sharp pang at the heart, Sibella Crawford learned that his affection was

already bestowed on another. But no despair followed this torturing discovery, nor did it occasion any diminution of her watchful care; and on Randall's return to consciousness, the intensity of the full gaze of her dark eyes fondly resting on him, sent a thrill through his weakened frame almost amounting to pain. As his recovery slowly advanced a thousand gentle attentions were lavished on him day by day, and so grateful were these ministrations,—so soft though fervid the glance which accompanied them, that before long the gratitude which they had awakened insensibly kindled into the warmer sentiment of admiration. The young Sibella was not slow to note this change and gather food for hope. And now her highest attractions were brought into play in order to advance the plan she had formed of supplanting her unknown rival. The charm of her music, the vivacity of her conversation, alternately soothed and enlivened the invalid, who began to look forward to the period of his approaching convalescence with a feeling not all of pleasure.

It would be the signal for his removal from an

influence that he was beginning to find as dangerous as it was delightful, and he could not but suspect that to the heart of the ardent girl who had so generously devoted herself to his service, his departure would occasion a pang that he shrank from the pain of inflicting. He was, however, but little prepared for the storm of passionate grief which his recall to his ship excited in the young creole; and the perplexity of his position was painful, indeed, when Mr. Crawford, seeming to take for granted that the affection demonstrated by his daughter was fully reciprocated by his young guest, pompously set forth that Sibella would be richly endowed, and without further circumlocution proceeded to express the satisfaction it would afford him to bestow her in marriage upon the son of his old friend.

Charles Randall was silent; a tumult of feeling agitated his heart; gratitude, admiration, the throbbings of incipient passion, all pleaded for Sibella. But there was a vivid recollection that could not be quenched,—a recollection of Emily.

Her gay glance, her soft blush,—her countless household graces rose to his imagination. He could not consent to place an insuperable barrier in the path of the hope he had secretly cherished, and gathering resolution as the one fair image brightened to his view, though greatly embarrassed how to express himself, with as little hesitation as the nature of the case admitted, he candidly acknowledged that the affection of which Miss Crawford was worthy was not his to bestow. The indignation of Mr. Crawford on receiving this avowal was excessive. He accused Randall of deception, of having trifled with the feelings of his daughter,—and peremptorily forbade him all further intercourse with her. The young sailor, therefore, rejoined his ship without having an interview with Sibella, but not without bidding her a fervent and grateful farewell in a letter which he took care should be conveyed to her. On the eve of sailing from Trinidad, he received a reply from the young creole, breathing of love, but uttering no word of reproach, and imploring to hear from him again, a request which he could

not but comply with. A correspondence thus commenced was not easily broken off. Randall, indeed, for obvious reasons, would gladly have dropped it, but Miss Crawford allowed him no opportunity of doing so. From time to time, wherever he might be, a letter from her failed not to come to hand. He could not pass over in silence this flattering recollection; common courtesy demanded his acknowledgement of it, and though he replied strictly in the tone of friendship to the ardent effusions he received, the perusal of which not unfrequently brought the warm blood to his cheek, it became manifest to him that his letters, guarded as they were, served to keep alive the flame it was his anxious wish to quench; and after a time he wrote so rarely, and with such brevity, that the correspondence, as far as he had a part in it, nearly died out. But Sibella not the less remembered, not the less loved. Passion had so stirred her heart that it could no more become still, and she was for ever looking into its

troubled depths—for ever listening to its unquiet murmurs.

Meanwhile, her outward life was calm. No visible storm had power to ruffle that tranquil surface. She bore unmoved the anger of her father on her persistence in the rejection of a wealthy suitor who, as time passed on, again and again stepped forward to solicit her hand in marriage. She evinced no consternation when, by an unfortunate mercantile speculation, Mr. Crawford lost in one day the greater portion of the fruit of the toil of his whole life; and when, sinking under this lamentable reverse of fortune, he left his daughter an orphan, her grief was by no means overwhelming. Gathering together the wreck of her late father's property, which he had bequeathed to her, she at once hastened to England, which was to her the "land of promise."

Just previous to her arrival, however, it so chanced that Charles Randall had sailed on a distant expedition, and consequently more than three years elapsed before his return. This interval was not lost by Miss Crawford. Always

keeping in view the determination she had formed of contriving, by some means or other, to become once more the familiar associate of the object of her affection, and his letters having revealed to her the studious and reflective bent of his mind, she spared no pains in acquiring the mental culture essential, she thought, to strengthen the interest which she knew well her mere graces and accomplishments had formerly excited. How to gain access to Randall's society was her next care. She knew that his family resided at Woodridge, and consequently there she determined to go. But she must be furnished with some pretext for quitting London and taking up her abode in that remote locality.

While turning over in her mind various schemes that suggested themselves for the furtherance of her purpose, by a happy accident, as she considered it, she became acquainted with a lady who was a family connection of the Randalls, and who, having been informed of the Gilbert's intention of receiving a guest into their domestic circle, casually mentioned the circum-

stance in the presence of Miss Crawford. Here, then, on the plea of seeking to provide herself with a desirable home, was an opportunity for carrying out her scheme, beyond what her wildest hopes could have anticipated, and she lost not an hour in making the application which was so favorably responded to on the part of the Gilberts. Well aware of the attachment and engagement subsisting between Charles Randall and Emily, she rejoiced in the field which would be open to her,—in the many opportunities that she doubted not would occur for supplanting her rival. Very cautiously she opened her scheme, and though on meeting once more the object of her first and only passion her heart throbbed to agony, and the sight of Emily, so richly endowed with simple and feminine graces, stung her to jealous fury, she succeeded in masking her feelings; and, unsuspected, plotted day by day against the peace of the lovers. As time went on, far from despairing, she gathered hope. It was obvious that her society was a source of enjoyment to Randall—that her music fascinated

—her conversation interested him. The companionship of Emily was not, as heretofore, the only attraction that drew him into the social circle that each evening assembled in the little drawing-room at the Gilberts; and though far from himself suspecting that his constancy was imperiled, it was not long before Sibella secretly triumphed in the certainty of having gained one step at least on her road to success.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was growing towards the end of autumn and the country was beginning to wear a cheerless aspect. Heavy rain and boisterous wind made bare the branches whose countless leaves, so lately burnished with richest hues, and quivering and glimmering in the sunlight, now lay perishing on the damp earth, carelessly trampled under foot by the passer-by, whose gaze but a little hour before had been ravished by their beauty.

Miss Dale looked out from her window and her countenance reflected somewhat of the external sadness surrounding her. It was manifest that her thoughts were troubled—that a shadow was on her spirit—that some painful idea was

brooding there. But it was not the leafless trees—not the barren fields on which her observation rested. On the winding high-road within her distant view she watched a solitary pedestrian whose form each moment lessened to her sight. It was the old letter carrier of the little suburb in which she resided.

Day after day had she followed his steps thus with a dull pain at her heart. Day after day, to her neighbours he had brought tidings, tidings of joy or grief, to her he had brought none. She was forgotten. The old friendship had died out of his heart; and what a space it had filled in her own—it had become almost as a part of her very being—it had taken the place of the love that had departed out of her life. And must she lose it now? But why had she allowed this one feeling to predominate over all others? Was it wise so to have done? Was there even reasonable excuse for it? Had she not often felt it was a tie that sooner or later must be slackened if not broken?

Miss Dale's life had been one of more than or-

dinary vicissitude. She had known much happiness and much sorrow—had loved and been beloved with such faith and fervour as belongs only to earnest natures. But she was a solitary woman now; her own heart only knew how this had come to pass. More than one suitor, even of late years, had endeavoured to win her from her seclusion—but it was in vain, and her life was gliding away in the shade and silence she had sought long ago, and so it should close, she said.

It was now some years ago and just as she was recovering from a grief, the shock and suddenness of which had brought her to the verge of the grave, that Miss Dale first became acquainted with Surrey. He it was who had infused a new interest into her life—who had incited her to mental exercise—to the employment of her talents—the enjoyment of the simple pleasures that lay within her reach; and through him a subdued delight—a chastened happiness had not unfrequently stolen into her spirit. In a case such as this, between friendship and love the

partition is slight; but arrived at the sober autumn of her days Miss Dale had persuaded herself that through her position in regard to Surrey there could arise no danger to her peace; if latterly she had become undeceived on this point—if she had felt poignant pain in detecting the secret of his heart, she was now ready to acknowledge that the pang was salutary—it revealed to her the true state of her feelings—she could no longer unconsciously indulge in an absorbing sentiment—she must set bounds to her preference—and she must learn to view in its real light Surrey's partiality for herself. His happiness was in no wise dependent upon her—it was simply the kindness of his nature that had prompted him to take an interest in her well-being—she had no power over his feelings—no part in his aspirations—no place in his path. Nevertheless was she not guilty of injustice in believing herself forgotten by him? Had he not again and again given proof that he valued her friendship? Was it reasonable to suppose that without just cause he would with-

draw from her his own? Ought she not rather to feel assured that by and bye his long silence would be satisfactorily explained? And would not the day arrive that they should meet as of old? Ah, how delightful had been to her the hours that long ago they had spent together! She had known no miserable jealousy then. But of late how again and again she had suffered this vile passion to usurp over her a terrible dominion. What misery had she not endured in witnessing the partial success of the wiles of Mrs. Duckenfield! But she had some excuse there—it would have been too lamentable for Surrey himself if he had succumbed to such worthless blandishments. In another instance however, her disquiet had been unpardonable. Ought she not to have *hoped* where she had feared. Would not a companion such as Emily have secured the happiness of her friend? In the frank and genial nature—the sweet cheerfulness—the simple graces of that dear girl, would he not have found all that his heart could desire? Would he not have felt that he was richly com-

pensated for the disappointment that had embittered his early life!—a disappointment of which Miss Dale had heard, but to which Surrey himself throughout all their confidential conversations, had never alluded. How selfish was the character of a friendship that would fain exact from its object an undivided affection! There could be no peace of mind where there existed so unreasonable a requirement. From this time forward she would root out of her heart the noxious and tormenting sting of jealousy. Her aspiration should be for the happiness of Surrey—no matter that she herself might have no part in ministering to it.

But here Miss Dale's reverie was interrupted. She had continued standing at the window, abstractedly gazing out upon the cheerless prospect, and the garden wicket had been opened, and a footstep had advanced within a few paces of the house door without arresting her notice: but now the sound of a familiar voice caught her ear, and looking down she saw Emily's sweet countenance lifted towards her. Was there a

shadow on that dear face? Surely it was a mere idle imagination to suppose so—a colouring of her own sombre mood;—and thus persuading herself, Miss Dale, turning from the window, hastened to admit her ever welcome visitor. Emily's greeting was however less cheerful than usual, and as if in excuse of it, she said that she was fatigued, a rare occurrence with her,—she had been taking a long walk.

“Not alone?”

“No, not alone: Miss Crawford and Mr. Randall had been her companions, and they were now proceeding homewards, while she had come to the Briars for a half hour's rest: and, besides, it was so long since she had seen dear Miss Dale.”

All this Emily said with a somewhat hurried manner; and then, sitting down, covered her face with her hands, and fairly burst into tears.

Miss Dale was no less surprised than distressed: she had never before witnessed in her young favorite any weakness of this nature—had never seen her thus overcome, except in the presence of some real sorrow; but, forbearing to question,

she attempted only to soothe, and with a few endearing words persuaded her to rest on the sofa. Emily mutely complied; she was still sobbing in a manner she seemed unable to repress, but silently, though her bosom heaved painfully and her tears were abundant.

Miss Dale removed the little bonnet that half covered the bright, glossy hair, and loosened the silken scarf tied round the fair throat.

“You have over-fatigued yourself. You will be better presently, love,” she said.

It was some time before Emily spoke.

“I am so ashamed of myself!” she cried at length, wiping away her tears, while a vivid blush died her cheeks. “I am so ashamed of myself!”

“You have no need to be, my dear,” said Miss Dale; “you had too long a walk, and too much laughing and chatting, perhaps, and so had worn your gay spirits out for the moment.”

“Yes, but it was not altogether that,” answered Emily with her accustomed frankness. “All at once a very foolish notion had come into my head, and it was *that* that upset me; but now I

am only angry with myself for having for a moment taken up such an idea, for after all it could have been nothing but my own nonsensical imagination."

This explanation was not very intelligible; nevertheless, Miss Dale still forbore to question.

"I will tell you the truth," resumed Emily, after a pause; "something—a mere trifle, all on a sudden, made me think that Charles did not care for me as he used to do."

"And so, in displeasure, you left him?"

"No, not in displeasure—but I was cut to the heart at the moment. And now I do so reproach myself for my ungenerous suspicion."

"Forget it, then, my dear girl."

"Oh! to be sure I will. But what a simpleton I have made myself!" cried Emily, with her own bright smile, and blushing like a rose; and she started from the sofa and began to tie on the little bonnet. "What a simpleton I have made myself!"

"Never mind that," said Miss Dale. "But you are not going to leave me just yet, surely?"

"No," said Emily, recovering from her con-

fusion, and again sitting down. "No, I have news to give you. We have heard from Mr. Surrey: mamma has had a long delightful letter from him. And where do you think he is now?"

"In Germany, perhaps?"

"No, in Italy, with Sir James and Lady Dalton."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and they all purpose wintering in Rome. Afterwards Mr. Surrey will be, he says, a solitary wanderer through strange lands for some years to come."

Miss Dale was silent, but her lip quivered, and she pressed her folded hands more closely together.

"We are all so sorry," resumed Emily, "that we are not to see him again for such a very long time; and he talks too of giving up all letter writing during his wanderings, so that it seems we must make up our minds altogether to lose sight of him for the next few years, and not to hear of him even through you. But, by the way, I must not forget to tell you he complains

of your having left his last letter unanswered, and that he begs us to enquire whether you have received a small parcel, sent, he says, by a private hand, and containing a trifle or two that in the way of art he fancies may be of some little interest to you."

Miss Dale's countenance instantaneously brightened; "I have done him injustice," she cried in her heart, while answering Emily that neither letter nor parcel had she yet received.

"In mamma's letter there was such a charming little note enclosed for Rhoda," continued Emily; "and it has quite cheered the dear child, who has, I am sorry to say, been very drooping of late."

"And but a little while ago she was all gaiety," said Miss Dale.

"Yes, and these frequent and unaccountable changes in her mood make me, I own, very uneasy."

"What is it you apprehend, my dear?"

"I really cannot give shape to my fear, but I

am persuaded that there is something at fault about her; and I observe that Doctor Bassett is in his quiet way watching her very attentively."

"I had hoped that this new guest of yours, with her music and charm of conversation, would have diverted your dear little sister's mind from its too great proneness to meditative indulgence, and that her more equable cheerfulness would very naturally have ensued."

"I suspect," said Emily, colouring, "that somehow or other Rhoda does not quite like Miss Crawford."

"Indeed! I fancied she was a favorite with all of you."

Emily's eyes were cast down, and without raising them; "*she is* very fascinating, certainly," she answered, "so clever, so accomplished, and with such captivating manners."

"And how is it that she does not find favor with your little sister?" enquired Miss Dale.

"I can hardly tell, and after all it is a mere guess of mine. But I have observed, of late

especially, that Rhoda shuns rather than seeks her society."

"And do you continue to spend your mornings with Miss Crawford."

"When I have time to spare for it, but that is seldom now, for, as you know, mamma has lately been but poorly; in consequence of which the household cares, devolving chiefly upon me, occupy my mornings pretty fully."

"Your guest then has to spend her mornings in solitude?"

"Not very often," answered Emily, again colouring and betraying some little embarrassment of manner; and then, after a slight pause, and with some little access of confusion she added, "Charles lately comes early to play chess with her."

"Indeed! I thought there was some sort of coolness between Mr. Randall and Miss Crawford."

"So there was at first, but that soon wore off, and they have so many tastes in common—are both so fond of music,—so fond of literature,

that they cannot but enjoy each other's society. O, Miss Dale, how I do wish that I were clever and accomplished!" cried Emily, fervently, as wrapping her shawl round her she prepared to depart.

"No one but yourself could wish you to be otherwise than you are, my dear girl," said Miss Dale, pressing a kiss on the blooming cheek of her young friend.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON the following morning as Emily left the breakfast-room, she met Mr. Randall, who was at that moment entering the house. He looked grave, and as he held out his hand to her, he said with some seriousness, "I want to have a talk with you, a talk with you alone."

Emily blushed, but making a movement of assent, advanced towards a small parlour.

"No," said Randall; "not there, we should be interrupted in the house. Cannot you walk with me?" He was still detaining her hand, but, as it seemed, unconsciously.

"I will get my bonnet and cloak directly," answered Emily.

“And I will wait for you in the garden,” he said; and releasing her hand proceeded to a retired path bordering a little shrubbery, where the lauristinas were in bloom and the leaves of the laurel glistened in the sunshine, which fitfully broke through dark masses of cloud that in a gloomy pile reared themselves against the sky. Randall, with the habit of a sailor, noted the aspect of the weather, and perceived that a storm was not far distant; but presently, seeing Emily already approaching, he calculated that before it broke there would be yet time for them to extend their walk far enough for the attainment of the object he had had in view when proposing it,—the private conference that the meditation of a sleepless night had urged him to seek. As Emily came up to him and smilingly put her hand within his arm, glancing at his countenance, she perceived on it an expression of more than usual gravity; the gaiety faded from her lips, and her eyelids drooped pensively, while again there occurred to her the painful suspicion that had crossed her mind on the preceding day;

for in the look Randall had now bestowed on her she missed the expression of earnest fondness that of old had so often deepened the colour on her cheek and joyfully quickened the beating of her heart. In silence they passed out of the garden, and taking the road that led towards the common, were soon beyond the precincts of the little town. Slackening the quick pace with which he had at first hurried forward, Randall then spoke—"Emily," he said, "I have a petition to make. Will you consent to let our marriage at once take place?"

Emily was startled.

The proposal came to her so suddenly—the tone in which it was uttered was so devoid of pleading tenderness—she knew not in what manner to reply to a request she intuitively felt was not prompted by the urgency of affection, and for a moment she remained silent.

"You hesitate," said Randall; "probably you have not considered as gravely as I have the objections to an engagement of indefinite length, the difficulty, the disquiet that arise out of it?"

"We promised my father," said Emily, softly, "to wait."

"Yes, to wait for my promotion, or at least for my employment. But, Emily, the promise was unwise. Do you not feel it was?"

"No," she answered, gently but firmly.

"I am to understand, then, by that promise it is your wish that we should abide?"

"Oh, Charles, you know my heart!" cried Emily: "do not speak so coldly, do not say it is my *wish*!"

"Your decision then let me call it. But, Emily, I would have you re-consider it, and God knows in making my request I have your happiness at heart no less than my own!"

He spoke earnestly enough now, and clasped with, no little fervor, the hand that but the moment before he had suffered to lie trembling on his arm.

"Think again," he added, "and let there be no more uncertainty for either of us."

"Uncertainty!" exclaimed Emily, almost involuntarily.

“Yes, uncertainty, anxiety, torture,” he said, “as *I* have found it. Let there be an end of all this. Let us at once be bound together by an indissoluble tie.”

“My father—” began Emily.

“I have no apprehension of being unable to overcome Mr. Gilbert’s scruples,” interrupted Randall; “it is your own that stand in the way.”

Emily’s heart beat painfully. She was suffering from a conflict of feelings that she could not find words for, and she remained silent.

Randall relinquished his clasp of her hand, and certain insinuations touching the absence of warmth in Emily’s nature that had of late been instilled into his mind now recurred to him.

“Forgive me,” he said, presently, in a changed tone, “forgive me for urging a suit displeasing to you. Forget my injudicious request, and receive my promise that it shall not be repeated.”

Tears rose to Emily’s eyes:

“ Oh, Charles, I know that I am misunderstood by you,” she cried, “ but indeed I feel that it would not be right to act so hastily as you proposed after having promised what we did,” and she looked pleadingly into his face.

Her tearful glance moved him. Was he worthy of the confiding tenderness it expressed? And as this thought suggested itself a pang akin to remorse, for a moment shot through his heart. But Emily was content, for he had looked on her fondly, and his hand had again sought hers. She was dear to him as ever, she thought, and the wish she had denied, the wish for their speedy union, was it not in itself a convincing proof of the fervour of his love? She forgot already how her heart had been chilled by the manner and the tone in which that wish had at first been expressed.

For a little while they walked on in silence, and when presently they again conversed there was no recurrence by either of them to the subject they had recently discussed. Arriving at the open common they began quickly to traverse

it, and were almost midway on its bleak expanse, when the dark clouds overhead suddenly burst, and a deluge of rain was furiously poured forth. No shelter was at hand, and as Emily's drenched garments, clinging to her limbs, impeded her light footsteps, while struggling to advance against the tempest of rain and wind that continued to assail them after turning on their homeward way, Randall reproached himself for having become unwatchful of the threatening signs that had indicated an approaching storm, and grew seriously uneasy at Emily's exposure to such inclement weather. But she gaily laughed at his apprehensions, and the face she turned towards him, looked so blooming, with her bright hair blown aside by the rough wind, and the rain sparkling on her cheeks, that Randall had little difficulty in being persuaded that no injury would follow; but he assiduously lavished on her all the care that was possible, care that to Emily it was new life to receive; and when she reached home, half-drowned and shivering as she then really was, she felt more light of heart than she had done for

many a day, and her parting smile to Randall was full of the innocent love that long ago she had confessed for him.

To avoid exciting the anxiety of Mrs. Gilbert, Emily, on her arrival at home, went at once to her own chamber, and divesting herself as rapidly as she could of her dripping garments, proceeded in all haste to apparel herself anew. When her toilette was complete, she felt so chilly that she was glad to hasten downstairs, and saet herself in a snug corner of the fire-side; but even there she shivered from time to time, and before long began to feel strange pains in her head and limbs; but, exerting herself to the utmost, she succeeded in concealing her growing indisposition, and busy with a piece of fine needlework, sat chatting with Mrs. Gilbert till the afternoon was far advanced. At length, however, she found herself forced to yield to the sense of increasing illness. Her fevered hands became almost powerless, and her parched lips could scarcely utter a word. Pleading a headache, she retired to her

chamber, and wrapping herself in a warm shawl, lay down on her bed.

When the dinner-hour arrived, Emily's place at the table was vacant. Rhoda, who was despatched to summon her sister, came back without her, saying that Emily's head still ached, and she would rather remain quiet till tea-time, when she thought she should be quite well; and Rhoda adding that she seemed a little sleepy, the absentee was left undisturbed, and without any particular anxiety being excited on her account, and in the evening, just as the tea was being served, Emily made her appearance in the drawing room. Randall, who was already there, and who had the moment before felt some anxiety on hearing of her indisposition, now, as he met her sparkling eyes, and noted the brilliant colour of her cheek, at once dismissed it from his mind. Indeed, it seemed to him that she had never appeared in more perfect health. She was in unusually gay spirits, too, talking with extraordinary vivacity and volubility, and at the

slightest provocation to mirth, laughing somewhat immoderately. He had never seen her in so excited a mood, her cheerfulness was ordinarily in a quieter vein—far less demonstrative than it appeared to-night. While mentally making these observations, Randall suddenly caught the glance of Miss Crawford; there was an expression in it that he could not withstand, and presently he was beside her, attentive only to the softly murmured words that were intended for no ear but his own.

Thus engrossed, he did not notice the entrance of Doctor Bassett, and probably would for some time have continued unaware of his presence, but for a slight commotion that it occasioned. Emily's hand, extended in eager welcome, had no sooner met the grasp of the friendly physician, than in unfeigned astonishment he exclaimed, "What's the meaning of this? What have you been doing with yourself? Off with you to bed this moment! You are not fit to be here, with such a hand as this, and with those burning cheeks. Off with you, I say."

Emily made an effort to remonstrate, but he would not hear her.

“Take her away,” he said peremptorily to Mrs. Gilbert, “and I will come and look at her in half-an-hour’s time, and see what can be done with this unruly pulse. Take her away,” he repeated, removing his fingers from her wrist; and opening the door for them to pass out, he stood with an authoritative gesture enforcing his commands.

“But I must say good night first,” cried Emily; “and, indeed, I have a great deal more to say. I am not ill at all. I feel so gay and light. There is a queer sort of sensation in my head, to be sure; it seems to turn round and round, but I don’t mind that: I shall be able to dance all the night through; and you are all going to dance I see, all standing up waiting for me to begin, I suppose, for you are all looking at me, and with such strange eyes.”

“Silence!” exclaimed Doctor Bassett, in a low determined voice, looking at her fixedly, “silence!”

Emily became instantaneously mute, and unresistingly suffered herself to be led out of the room.

The little party left behind could scarcely understand what had been going forward, and looked at one another in speechless astonishment; but presently, Mr. Gilbert, whose countenance had gradually assumed an expression of alarm, hastily rose, and pursuing Dr. Bassett who was descending the stairs, seized him by the arm, exclaiming, "What is the matter with my dear child?"

"There is a little fever about her."

"She is in no danger?"

"None in the world if she is kept perfectly quiet. She must not be allowed to speak or she will talk till she does not know what she is about."

"You will see her again to-night, Doctor?"

"Yes, yes; did I not say that I would as soon as Mrs. Gilbert has got her quietly to bed? I have another patient to visit now, but I will come back here presently," and with a hasty nod the Doctor departed.

On Mr. Gilbert's return to the drawing-room, Andrew interrogated him anxiously, and after receiving his report crept about on tiptoe and scarcely spoke above a whisper. Emily was his favourite sister. There was nobody so good-natured, he thought; how ready she always was to help him out of any little difficulty that he might fall into. And once in a childish illness that he remembered, how tenderly she had nursed him! And now, what could he do for her? Oh! he would go out and buy some of the finest fruit that could be got. Fruit was good in fever, Emily had told him so herself only a day or two ago, when he had met her carrying a little basket full of it to a poor dwelling. And with noiseless steps Andrew descended the stairs, and quietly letting himself out at the street door, hurried away to make his purchase.

Randall had not spoken since Emily's disappearance, but had stood apart leaning against the chimney piece, lost in thought; and now, as Mr. Gilbert approached him, said, "This is a sad affair. Our poor Emily is extremely ill, I fear," he still continued silent, but looked so

miserable that his sympathy was sufficiently manifest, and Mr. Gilbert, cordially wringing his hand, without more words, turned away, and with a heavy heart went to his private office to await in solitude Dr. Bassett's return.

Mrs. Gilbert and Rhoda had accompanied Emily to her chamber, and Randall was now therefore alone with Miss Crawford, and although his eyes continued resolutely fixed on the ground, he felt that her penetrating gaze was resting on him, and, assailed by conflicting emotions, there was a strange tumult in his heart. Presently Miss Crawford rose and silently approaching him, softly laid her hand on his arm. He looked up; their eyes met, and instantaneously Sibella's dusky countenance was brightened by a triumphant smile.

CHAPTER XV.

THE illness which had so suddenly attacked Emily rapidly increased, and proved to be of a dangerous character. To what cause it was owing could only be conjectured. A visit to one of her poor pensioners, lying ill of fever, was generally supposed to have led to it; but on the other hand, the cold and wet to which during her last walk she had been so unluckily exposed, might possibly have occasioned it. Doctor Bassett was silent as to his opinion of its cause, but secretly attributed the condition of his patient to some painful mental agitation through which he believed she had passed, but that her family were, he perceived, unconscious of.

It was a sad household now at the Gilberts! Emily was beloved by them all, and the suspicion of her danger brought a keener grief than any which they had yet experienced. In the sick room few were permitted to attend; yet there, silent and pale as marble, Rhoda was invariably to be found; and it was remarkable that Emily, who at the height of her malady recognized no other person, had obviously always a faint consciousness of the presence of her little favorite, a feeble but tender smile passing over her countenance whenever she was approached by her.

Fanny, who had been hastily summoned home in the early stage of her sister's illness, was so unnerved by alarm as the disorder gained ground, that she could do little but helplessly weep, and far from proving a comfort, added only to the trouble of the family. Rhoda's tearless composure was so little understood by her, that she attributed to want of sensibility what was in fact the strength born of affection. But Mrs. Gilbert, who, neglectful of her own ailments, was now constantly by the bedside of her darling Emily, failed not

to view in its true light that outward calm, which, in the sick-room, made the gentle ministrations of her little daughter invaluable.

The crisis of Emily's malady was long in arriving, and, day by day, the suspense of her friends grew more painful. Mr. Gilbert strove hard to buoy himself up with hope, and succeeded generally in maintaining an aspect of tolerable composure, while Andrew, imitating his father's example, allowed no one to suspect the amount of his uneasiness. But they both suffered in secret, and their anxious looks betrayed the apprehension they were solicitous to conceal.

Randall did not ask to see Emily, but morning and evening came to learn tidings of her; and when on these occasions he sometimes refused to enter the house, the extreme wretchedness depicted on his countenance made it sufficiently manifest that he was in a state of mind fit only for solitude; and it was known that, day after day, he wandered for hours together in the most unfrequented paths, rarely returning to his own home till night-fall.

Miss Crawford at this time remained for the most part alone in her little study, but about the hour that Randall was accustomed to make his call of enquiry, she was ever on the watch, and, by some means or other, usually contrived to see him, if only for a moment, but from these brief interviews she not unfrequently returned to the solitude of her apartment with a contracted brow, and instead of pursuing her usual occupations would sit for hours afterwards with folded hands and plunged in thought.

Fanny, in her intervals of weeping, wandered restlessly about the house, going from room to room, and peevishly reprimanding the servants for omissions in the usual routine of their duties, which at this season of domestic distress might well have been excused. Mr. Sandham visited her almost daily, and according to the rule and measure of his narrow views, attempted the office of consolation. But if Fanny reaped any benefit from his formal admonitions, it certainly did not appear in her outward demeanour, her sorrow continuing to wear an aspect of discon-

tent and feeble irritation utterly at variance with resigned submission.

Emily, not only in the circle of her home, but throughout its neighbourhood, was so beloved, that her illness was the cause of almost general gloom, and all the little social gaities of Woodridge were, in consequence of it, suspended.

But to no one heart out of the immediate family of the Gilberts did the knowledge of Emily's danger bring keener sorrow than to that of Miss Dale, whose affection for her young friend had been heightened by a cause that, to a nature less generous than her own, would not improbably have proved fatal to its continuance; and now a pang for Surrey was not unmingled with her grief.

In sad meditation, and her eyes heavy with weeping, she was sitting late one evening in the twilight of her solitary apartment, when the door was suddenly opened, and Rhoda, springing forward, threw herself into her arms, and sobbed forth the joyful tidings of her beloved sister's safety. Emily had passed through the dreaded

crisis of her disorder, and now all danger was at an end. Miss Dale folded her little favourite to her heart, and together they mingled their tears of thankfulness. It was a moment of purest happiness, never to be forgotten by either of them, and strengthened the bond of sympathy, which, notwithstanding the disparity of their years, already united them.

On the day following the announcement of the happy change in Emily's state, her betrothed lover stood at her bedside, holding within his own the soft, white, wasted hand which she had feebly put forward to welcome him. She had no strength for words, but her speaking eyes eloquently expressed the language of her heart, and Randall, agitated by conflicting emotions, finding it impossible to meet steadily their fond confiding glance, relinquished, somewhat abruptly, his hold of the little hand, and, turning to Mrs. Gilbert, reminded her of Doctor Bassett's injunction that his interview with the invalid should be short.

A shade of disappointment passed over Emily's countenance, and a few large tears rolled slowly

down her pallid cheeks as the door of her chamber closed on his departure. During the rest of that day her recovery did not proceed favourably, in consequence of which Doctor Bassett positively interdicted, for the present, the admission of any visitor whatsoever, and Emily, without remonstrance, submitted to the prohibition. But the langour of her spirits appeared to retard the progress of her bodily strength. The cheerfulness that heretofore had seemed as a part of herself was dormant now, and but for the reiterated assurances of Dr Bassett, that time and patience only were required for her complete restoration, the tardiness attending her amendment would have caused serious apprehension in the minds of her family and friends. Relying implicitly, however, on the good physician's judgment, they hopefully awaited her return to the domestic circle, and resumed by degrees the ordinary occupations and pursuits that had been interrupted by her illness.

Miss Crawford, whose piano had remained closed during the late family distress, now, as if

anxious to make up for lost time, devoted herself with more zeal than ever to her favourite accomplishment. The arrival of some new vocal duets which she had ordered from London, furnished her with a plea for inviting Randall to her apartment on his daily visits of enquiry, and the sound of their voices united in concert not unfrequently ascended to the chamber of the invalid. Sometimes, also, Emily, whose couch was occasionally wheeled towards the window, looked out upon the cheerless winter twilight, and perceived, lingering in a sequestered path, two forms which, notwithstanding the dimness of the hour, she had no difficulty in recognizing.

Randall's early and long attachment to Emily Gilbert was so well-known to her family, that the possibility of his affection becoming transferred to another never entered their minds, and his increasing intimacy with Miss Crawford was witnessed by them without suspicion, and attributed merely to the accidental circumstances, which, in the altered domestic arrangements con-

sequent on Emily's illness, had so frequently thrown him into her society.

Sibella herself was dissatisfied at the slow progress of her treacherous scheme, for Randall, notwithstanding her consummate art, had not yet fully answered her hopes,—had not yet been drawn into making a direct avowal of his love. Though his looks not unfrequently betrayed that her power over him was unquestionable, she knew well that a struggle was going on within his breast; that passion was at war with principle, and while this conflict lasted she felt that her triumph was incomplete.

“Tell me,” said she one day to Randall, as in thoughtful silence he sat beside her, “tell me the meaning of that serious brow?”

He made no answer.

“You do not share in the general rejoicing here to-day it seems,” she said. “But you are not aware perhaps of the felicity awaiting you. Miss Gilbert is to make her appearance amongst us this evening.”

He changed colour, but continued silent.

“What no joy now!” cried Sibella; “no joy now!—Or is it joy too great for utterance?” And her flashing eyes seemed to dive into his innermost thoughts.

“Must my tortured feelings be made your sport?” he said.

“You wrong me!” she cried, passionately, “you wrong me! And there is a cold, cold heart that you can read no better than mine.”

He turned his eyes towards her with a quick glance of enquiry.

“Yes,” she continued, “and before an altar where no fire burns, you are ready to offer up a warm living sacrifice.”

“I cannot deal with parables,” he answered; “but this I know, there is no truer heart under heaven than the one that you deem cold.”

“No truer heart!” she exclaimed, vehemently. “No truer heart! Has it from first warm consciousness had only one hope? Has it for long years struggled against the agony of uncertainty? Has it forgiven the wrong of being won without purpose?—the indignity of being unworthily

forsaken! And does it now pour the full measure of its love where it is coldly met by an idle scruple,—a vain objection?"

Sibella's glowing words and her glittering eyes instinct with passion, that as she spoke were piercingly fixed on Randall, lighted up within his breast the smouldering flame he had been vainly endeavouring to quench, and some rash words were about to escape his lips, when their utterance was arrested by the entrance of Rhoda, who taking up a book that lay on the table, quietly seated herself beside him.

At this interruption Sibella wore her darkest frown, though half assured of triumph by a gaze furtively directed towards her. Impatient of the restraint imposed by Rhoda's presence, and determined to escape it, she rose and went towards the window with the intention of proposing a walk,—a proceeding which would, she believed, secure to her the companionship she desired,—but looking out on the weather, she perceived that it rained heavily, and irritated by disappointment angrily quitted the apartment.

Early in the evening of the same day, with the fire burning brightly and the curtains closely drawn, Emily, wrapt in a soft white shawl, sat half reclining on the sofa in the drawing-room. There was a faint colour in her cheeks, but wasted by her recent illness they had lost something of the perfect oval of their form, and in her eyes appeared a languor indicative of the slow progress of her convalescence. Indeed, both in her countenance and attitude the extreme debility from which she still suffered was plainly visible, and the joy of her family on this her first return to their assembled circle was tempered by some anxiety, lest the effort it had required of her, should retard rather than hasten the course of her recovery.

On this evening Charles Randall failed to make his customary visit to the Gilberts, and his absence occasioned no little surprise, especially as the expectation of the invalid's joining the family circle had in the morning been mentioned to him. Emily's faint colour deepened, and her breath fluttered quickly at the sound of the turn-

ing of the door-handle when, after the assembling of the domestic party, some one was about to enter the room; agitated and trembling she cast down her eyes, and did not perceive who presently was approaching her; the next moment, however, the heightened color faded from her cheek, and she became pale as marble, when a softly-toned congratulation announced to her the presence of Miss Crawford.

Presently afterwards an alarm was raised; there was a cry for more air—an exclamation that Emily had fainted. But she had not fainted, for she retained her consciousness, though her eyes had closed and her lips whitened, and she had no power to speak. In the course of a few minutes, however, she revived, although the restoratives that had been quickly administered had little share in promoting her recovery; but by a severe mental effort she had succeeded in calming the sudden and painful tumult of her heart, and gradually there came back to her countenance the faint bloom that had fled from it. The first attempt of the invalid to join the

assembled family having proved so inauspicious, more than a week elapsed before she was again allowed to make her appearance amongst them.

In this interval she had become stronger in health, and so schooled her feelings that she had little apprehension of relapsing into the weakness she had before so involuntarily betrayed; and so well had she measured her strength, that on her first meeting with Randall, which occurred in the presence of others, she succeeded in keeping so strict a guard over her emotions, that although in the confused greeting he bestowed on her she at once detected the absence of that tenderness which his every word and look had of old so plainly expressed, she exhibited no more agitation than might naturally enough be attributed to the tremulous joy that was supposed to be fluttering at her heart.

Miss Crawford now joined more frequently than formerly the family party, and was profuse in attentions to Emily. Nothing, indeed, could exceed the amiability she displayed generally. Her various delightful accomplishments were

exercised, not so much, it seemed, for her own gratification, as for the sake of contributing to the pleasure of others; and most certainly they cast a grace and refinement over the little household. Fanny was, undoubtedly, a skilful pianist, and Rhoda was bidding fair even to excel her; but in Sibella's music there was the inspiration of genius, and when she poured forth the triumphant melody of her voice, an influence was achieved of which she knew well the value. But it was not in one art alone that Miss Crawford excelled; her portfolio was rich in the vivid hues of tropical flowers, the bright plumage of tropical birds; and even the half-finished embroidery that lay on her work-table, in the soft blending of its colours, and the graceful grouping of its mimic leaves, displayed consummate taste. But it was her varied power of conversation, the flexible play of her dusky countenance, and the animated grace of her slender form, that, at her pleasure, invested Sibella with her rarest and most irresistible attractions, and the adventitious aids of a refined toilet, that, subservient to artistic skill,

drew no observation to itself, insensibly heightened her manifold fascinations.

Yet captivating as it was in Miss Crawford's power to appear, one who loved Emily Gilbert might well have escaped the snare set for him, if in support of it there had been no recourse to treachery; but, day by day, there had been cunningly infused into Randall's mind doubts of his affection being in full measure responded to, till at length the innate modesty of Emily's nature began to be mistaken by him for coldness of feeling; whilst Sibella, from time to time, artfully betrayed to him the fervor of her own heart, the constancy of its passionate devotion. And when, owing to Emily's untoward illness, the field became clear to her, she had redoubled her machinations, and stung to jealous anger on the appearance of her innocent rival before the achievement of her full success, her impatience grew intolerable, and with eager cunning she plotted anew for the accomplishment of her purpose.

The torture of mind endured by Randall

could not but impress some traces on his countenance, and his unquiet glance and contracted brow plainly enough indicated the presence of secret anxiety; but a certain reserve that was habitual to him kept at bay all familiar questioning as to the cause of his uneasiness, and the silent speculations concerning it fell, for the most part, wide of the mark.

It was at this juncture of affairs that Randall was one day startled by receiving official intelligence of his appointment as first lieutenant to a frigate destined for foreign service, and an order for holding himself in readiness to join his ship in the course of the following month. How ardently had a contingency such as this been desired by the young officer a few months ago! But now the intimation of his promotion came fraught with perplexity and misery. How could he plead to Emily for the fulfilment of her pledge, with his whole being stirred by the unquiet passion that Sibella had at length succeeded in inspiring? Or, on the other hand, how could he insult a blameless and tender heart? how could

he outrage his own honour by the rupture of a bond scarcely less sacred than that of marriage?

After much torturing consideration Randall arrived at the conclusion that he might for the present be able to temporize. That Emily's yet unassured convalescence would furnish the excuse for his failing to urge the fulfilment of their engagement; to the unseen future he would defer, he thought, the final conflict between his honour and his love; and so resolving, he set forth on his accustomed visit to the Gilberts.

CHAPTER XVI.

EMILY's lately pallid cheeks flushed crimson, and her eyelids were instantaneously cast down on Randall's announcement of his unexpected appointment, and when he proceeded to speak of his speedy departure there were some anxious looks furtively directed towards her. Rhoda, stealing to her side and sympathisingly taking her hand, felt it grow cold and tremulous, and pressing nearer, detected the fluttering movement of the heart that was so painfully agitated. Miss Crawford was not present, and Randall in making his communication to the Gilberts had not appeared to address himself to any one member of the family in particular, and from Emily, as

however *she* only had observed, his glance had been studiously averted. His visit was shorter than usual; but as he was about to leave the house, passing on his way the closed door of the study, he suddenly stopped, and after a moment's hesitation turned and entered the apartment. Miss Crawford, who was stooping over her drawing, looked up brightly at his approach and laying down her pencil, in eager welcome stretched forth her hand. Grasping it in silence he held it long within his own, looking at her the while with piercing earnestness. The glance he met was so eloquent of vivid love that his half formed resolution of reserve melted before it, and he proceeded to communicate to her the intelligence already announced to the Gilberts. He might still, however, have retained some guard over the expression of his feelings, but for Sibella's passionate tears and sobs at the prospect of their impending separation. Agonized at beholding the vehemence of her grief, he thought only of consolation, and leaning over her, whispered of hope—of the approaching separa-

tion not being final—of the possibility of a happy re-union. But no sooner had he succeeded in calming her wild outburst of sorrow than he would have given worlds to recall his rash words—to be guiltless of such flagrant treachery towards Emily; and with remorse at his heart, abruptly escaping from the presence of Sibella, he hastened into solitude. Hour after hour he continued to pace to and fro a cheerless wintry path, endeavouring to stifle the upbraidings of his conscience—to persuade himself into a belief of Emily's growing indifference towards him. Had she not refused her consent to the hasty marriage he had urged? Had she not received in silence the announcement of his approaching departure? Had she not, indeed, again and again, failed to demonstrate the ardour that was, perhaps, inseparable from genuine affection?

But it was in vain that, by thus striving to find some confirmation of the insinuations which from time to time had been whispered into his ear, Randall sought to find palliation for his dereliction of honour. He could not but acknow-

ledge that if impassioned fervor had no part in Emily's sweet nature, its purity and its truth were not unaccompanied by the gentlest, womanly tenderness, and proof upon proof arose involuntarily to his mind of the loveliness of her character. A sharp pang of remorse shot through his heart at the thought of the wrong he was inflicting on her, and for a moment her treacherous rival appeared to his imagination, as the incarnation of an evil spirit. But his brain was becoming bewildered by the perplexities of his meditations. Darkness was falling, and under its friendly cover he hastened homewards, glad of escaping the recognition of the few passers-by whom he encountered on the way. But so restless was the state of his mind, that hardly had he reached his home before he again set forth, and with a pertinacity of purpose that was strangely at variance with the indecision of his feelings, went, as usual, to conclude his evening at the Gilberts. When he entered their cheerful drawing-room, Miss Crawford was the centre of a little group, to whom, with her portfolio

lying open, she was minutely describing the singular characteristics of a tropical bird. The approach of Randall suddenly arrested her fluent speech, and with a smile of peculiar meaning she bent on him her flashing eyes. As he met that expressive glance, involuntarily his heart thrilled with an agitating transport that was betrayed in his countenance, and he felt that he was again under the full influence of a dangerous fascination. Miss Crawford had, indeed, spared no pains to captivate. Even in trifles she well understood the art of enhancing her attractions, and her evening costume, which invariably presented a marked contrast to the severe simplicity of her morning toilette, was to-night unusually rich, and displayed in perfection the symmetry of her figure, which, small and slender as a child's, was yet instinct with womanly grace and dignity. A string of large pearls encircling her slight throat, and a graceful peculiarity in the arrangement of her dark and abundant hair, in conjunction with the dusky tint of her complexion, invested her also with an air some-

what foreign and fantastic, and that was in striking contrast to the simplicity of her fair young companions.

On the entrance of Randall, Emily, with Rhoda beside her, was sitting apart and somewhat in shadow, and he did not appear at first to be conscious of her presence; but presently, on the scattering of the little party that had been gathered round the portfolio, he approached her and made some common-place enquiry concerning the progress of her recovery. She did not immediately answer him and in some surprise he looked at her more fixedly than he had yet done; she was, however, sitting so far from the light that he did not perceive her sudden change of colour and the quivering of her pallid lips; and when in the course of a moment or two she replied to the question he had put, the tremulousness of her voice struck him simply as indicating the weak state of her health. Emily made no attempt at continuing the conversation and Randall soon quitted her side, for Miss Crawford had gone to the piano and required

his assistance to turn over the leaves of her music-book. Others of the party drew near the large table, on which a lamp burned, and taking up books or work pursued their usual occupations. But Emily and Rhoda still sat at the further end of the apartment with no employment but that of winding between them a large ball of wool. Presently Mrs. Gilbert, with her knitting in her hand, came and sat down by them.

"This sort of light will do very well for my easy work," she said.

"And it is so pleasant to be out of the glare of the lamp," said Rhoda.

"Ah, my love, I am sorry that with your young eyes you should find it so."

"We must follow Doctor Bassett's advice more literally to-morrow," observed Emily, "we must sit in a darkened room."

"But last night when I was quite in the dark I saw such bright flashes," said Rhoda: "a sort of zig-zag light—brighter than the brightest flame kept dancing before my eyes till I was quite giddy, and just now I saw some little

circles of fire turning round and round as fast as possible, when I was looking for the ball of wool that had rolled into that dark corner."

"Such optical delusions are not uncommon, I believe, but you had better not think about them, my dear," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"Yet she must not be altogether careless of such symptoms," said Emily. "Doctor Bassett insists on their proving, beyond doubt, that she ought, for the present, to use her sight as little as possible."

"Well, then, she must make it complete holiday time, shut up her books, and put away all that fine white embroidery she has been so busy over of late till after Christmas, at least, so as to give her eyes a good long rest."

"Now what is this fancy you have taken into your head about Rhoda's eyes?" said Mr. Gilbert, looking up from his newspaper: "You won't see a brighter pair anywhere. Come here, my little girl, and let me have a look at them through my spectacles. I'll answer for it there is not a mote to be found in them, whatever the Doctor may say."

Rhoda went towards her father, but as she approached the bright light of the lamp, involuntarily shrank back and covered her eyes with her hands; "It is such a glare here!" she cried.

"Yes, to be sure," said Mr. Gilbert, "when you have been sitting almost in the dark all the evening. Why I find the same thing every night of my life when the office lamp is first lighted. Come, you little simpleton, put away your hands and let me look at these foolish eyes of yours," and he drew Rhoda nearer to him.

"Don't, dear papa, don't!" she cried, as with her eyes now uncovered, he drew her still closer to the light.

"Well, well, away with you! I can find out nothing the matter;" and pressing a kiss on her forehead, Mr. Gilbert released his little daughter.

"I think it is time now for you and me to go," said Emily softly as Rhoda returned to her, "but we need not disturb the others;" and with a whispered 'good night' to Mrs. Gilbert, the two girls stole away unobserved.

It was not till considerably later in the evening, after the piano was closed and when Randall was about to take his departure, that he became aware of Emily's absence. Pausing a moment as if in expectation of her re-appearance he was addressed by Mrs. Gilbert: "You must take extraordinary delight in music, Mr. Randall," she said, "to give during a whole evening your undivided attention to it."

He felt that reproof was implied, and conscious of deserving it, made no answer.

Mrs. Gilbert, far from suspecting the real state of the case, fearful that she had said too much and anxious to conciliate, stretched out her hand to him, saying, with a friendly smile, "Come, come, forgive me, and behave better to-morrow."

The sense of his treachery smote painfully on his heart and scarcely touching the offered hand, without a word he hastily quitted the apartment.

For a few minutes after his departure Mrs. Gilbert fell into anxious consideration. Randall's

temper was in fault, she thought, he had given proof of it, as it now occurred to her, on two or three previous occasions, and the coolness between Emily and himself that had sometimes not escaped observation was doubtless owing to that cause, although Mr. Gilbert had viewed it in a different light, silencing the uneasiness she had occasionally expressed to him on the subject, by jestingly reminding her that lovers' quarrels were proverbial.

More than half suspecting that Emily's early disappearance this evening had been prompted by wounded feeling, and anxious lest her still weak health should suffer in consequence of any such excitement, Mrs. Gilbert before retiring for the night hastened to see her. On entering her chamber she found that Emily was already sleeping, and stooping over her pillow perceived that her flushed cheek bore traces of recent emotion, and that her eyelashes were still heavy with tears.

That she had been agitated by some painful disquietude could not be doubted, and it was

with redoubled uneasiness that Mrs. Gilbert turned from the contemplation of her disturbed countenance and softly quitted the chamber.

On the following day, and again and again, when Randall made his accustomed visit, Emily was not present; she was in the darkened and quiet room, to which Doctor Bassett had peremptorily insisted that Rhoda should for the present confine herself, and which suited, she said, her own state of health.

Fanny was so much occupied with Mr. Sandham, whose visits were constant, while Mrs. Gilbert had her attention claimed by such a variety of household affairs, that Miss Crawford was often the only one of the domestic party sufficiently disengaged to see and converse with Randall on the daily visits, ostensibly of enquiring for the two invalids, that he continued to make. Availing herself to the utmost of the new opportunity thus afforded of advancing her scheme, Sibella, redoubling her arts, soon succeeded in making inextricable the entanglements from which hitherto escape had not appeared wholly impossible.

Nearly a week had now elapsed since Randall's appointment had been notified to him, and it became obvious that he had no intention of claiming the fulfilment of Mr. Gilbert's promise and making his approaching departure the plea for obtaining consent to an immediate union with Emily. Her present weak state of health, however, seemed to her family to afford a sufficient explanation of the cause of this remissness and completely to justify it. But if any further excuse had been wanting it might, they thought, have been found in Emily's altered manner, in her withdrawal from Randall's society, on one pretext or other, whenever it was possible, and in her constrained behaviour when meeting him was unavoidable. Utterly blinded by their confidence in Randall, their knowledge of his long attachment to Emily, and their implicit belief in his honour, they never for a moment gravely suspected that the attention he bestowed on Miss Crawford indicated the transfer of his affections, but considered it simply the renewal of an old friendship. Even Mrs. Gilbert, who was of opinion that Randall de-

voted to their guest much more of his time than was needful, believed his fondness for music to be the cause of it; and though surmising that Emily was sometimes pained by perceiving that he was so powerfully attracted by an accomplishment not possessed by herself, she was far from imagining that her peace was permanently endangered by the presence of an artful rival.

Emily, however, though seldom absent from her little sister, did occasionally, and especially when Miss Dale was admitted to see her young favorite, join for an hour or two the general domestic party, and with her perception quickened by the torturing suspicion that a variety of concurrent circumstances had already awakened, she could not fail to remark the secret understanding that existed between Miss Crawford and Randall. After much painful thought her course of action was decided on; and one evening as the young officer was taking his departure, on his bidding her good night, she silently slipped into his hand a folded letter.

CHAPTER XVII.

EARLY the next morning, as Mr. Gilbert, before the business of the day commenced, was sitting alone in his office, the door was softly opened, and Emily appeared. "Well, my love, what have you got to say to me now?" he cried cheerfully, for he was accustomed at this hour to have many a little request preferred to him by one or other of his children.

But Emily grew so pale as she stood silently before him, that he became suddenly alarmed.

“What is the matter, my dear child?” he exclaimed, hastily, “what has happened?”

“Nothing at all, indeed, dear papa,” she answered, seating herself beside her father, and vainly endeavouring to steady her tremulous voice, “nothing has happened; but I want to talk to you a little if you will be so very kind as to listen to me.”

“Listen to you, my dear love!” cried Mr. Gilbert, “to be sure I will. But if there is nothing amiss, why do you come to me with such a white face as I see here?” And his eyes rested uneasily on her countenance. But almost as he spoke her pallor fled, and she coloured violently under his scrutinizing glance.

“Aha!” he said, stroking her crimsoned cheek. “Aha! I begin to understand the matter now. You are come to remind me of a certain promise. But, upon my word, I think the young gentleman might have taken this office upon himself, and spared your blushes, my dear.”

“Oh, papa,” she cried, “it is not as you sup-

pose. I shall never want to claim that promise : and this is what I came to tell you."

"I see," said Mr. Gilbert, "you think Master Charley has shown himself somewhat backward of late, and so you are willing to punish him. But, my love, you have been ill you must remember, and I dare say he believes on that account that we should not consent to part with you just at present, nor should we indeed. And, moreover, it seems to me, he has some reason to suspect that if he displayed any ardour in the matter, you would yourself throw cold water upon it; for it can't be denied that for some time past you have kept yourself aloof from him over much. But never mind, my dear child; it will be all right in the end. Lovers' quarrels don't last for ever. Depend on it, Randall will be coming back as soon as he can, and anxious enough to have the knot tied."

"No, my dear father," answered Emily, speaking very calmly, but with her face turning again of an ashy paleness. "No, it will not be so. The engagement between us is at an end."

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Gilbert, hastily; “you don’t mean to say that Charles Randall has presumed to break it off?”

“It is *I* who have done so,” she answered.

“This is going too far, Emily” said her father in some displeasure. “Such a step should not be taken without consulting your friends. You should consider that a reputation for inconstancy is by no means an enviable distinction for a young woman to obtain.”

“Indeed, indeed, I have tried to do what seemed right,” she said, now sobbing bitterly.

“Right! my child. Did you not enter willingly into this engagement? Why then break it?”

“It was best for both,” she answered.

Mr. Gilbert grew impatient.

“You are trifling with your happiness,” he said, “and more than this, you are wronging a worthy heart.”

Emily’s tears flowed faster but she was silent.

Her father appeared distressed, but still wore an aspect of grave displeasure, and presently

without speaking he rose, and began slowly to pace the apartment. In a few minutes, however when his daughter's agitation had in some measure subsided, he stopped suddenly before her and demanded whether Randall himself had consented to the dissolution of their engagement.

"Yes," she replied faintly.

"And how long," he enquired with increasing dissatisfaction, "how long has this affair been settled between you?"

"Only now—only this morning," she answered.

"What, is Randall in the house now? Why does not he come to speak to me himself then?"

"No, papa, he is not here, but I have had a letter from him."

"You will not object to let me see this letter Emily," said Mr. Gilbert after a moment's consideration.

"Oh, dear papa, pray don't insist on my shewing it to you!" cried she in a tone of alarm.

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear," said Mr. Gilbert, a little softened by her evident distress,

"don't agitate yourself. I won't make a point of actually seeing the letter, but I must be informed of its substance."

"It was in answer to a letter of mine about—about what we have been talking of," faltered Emily with tears rushing to her eyes.

"About cancelling your engagement, you mean?" said her father.

Emily replied that it was so.

"And to this proposal of yours, Randall signifies his readiness to assent," pursued Mr. Gilbert.

"Yes, he agrees to what I wish."

"And without remonstrance of any sort?"

"He supposes—he thinks that it must be," she answered timidly.

"Very well," said Mr. Gilbert, "I must, however, see him myself on this subject."

"Oh, papa, he is gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed her father, "gone where?"

"I don't know," she cried tearfully.

"He is coming back of course," said Mr. Gilbert.

“No,” she answered, almost inaudibly.

“Not coming back!” exclaimed her father. “Let me tell you then, if a caprice of yours has driven him away, you have to blame yourself for being placed in a very painful and a very awkward position.”

Emily was silent, but her tears flowed abundantly.

“Instead of all this grief now, you should have considered beforehand the consequences of the step you were about to take,” said Mr. Gilbert, adopting in the keen vexation of the moment, a tone foreign to the indulgent kindness usually characterizing his manner towards his children. “But,” continued he, “you seem altogether to have lost sight of your ordinary good sense, and to have acted in this matter with unbecoming rashness, and with unjustifiable severity also if, as I suppose, the resolution you have taken is the result only of some trifling disagreement between you, some mere lovers’ quarrel.”

“There has been nothing of this sort,” said Emily, wiping away her tears, and making an

effort at composure; "There has been no quarrel at all."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Gilbert with increasing displeasure; "then it appears that without any cause whatever, you have thought proper to become disregardful of a grave obligation; and to make manifest your ingratitude for an honourable and long-tried affection."

"Oh, papa, you cannot think thus hardly of me!" cried Emily, again weeping bitterly.

"At what other conclusion is it possible for me to arrive?" demanded her father. "You assign no reason for the course you have adopted."

"I cannot—I cannot *yet*," she sobbed forth.

"What do you mean by 'not yet?'" said Mr. Gilbert, impatiently: "If for the rash step you have taken you have it in your power to assign any reasonable motive, I must insist on it's not being withheld from me."

But Emily made no answer.

"Tell me," said Mr. Gilbert, impatiently, ex-

asperated by the silence that he mistook for obstinacy; "Tell me at once on what account the engagement between Randall and yourself has been broken off."

"Oh, do not ask me, papa! Do not ask me!" she cried imploringly.

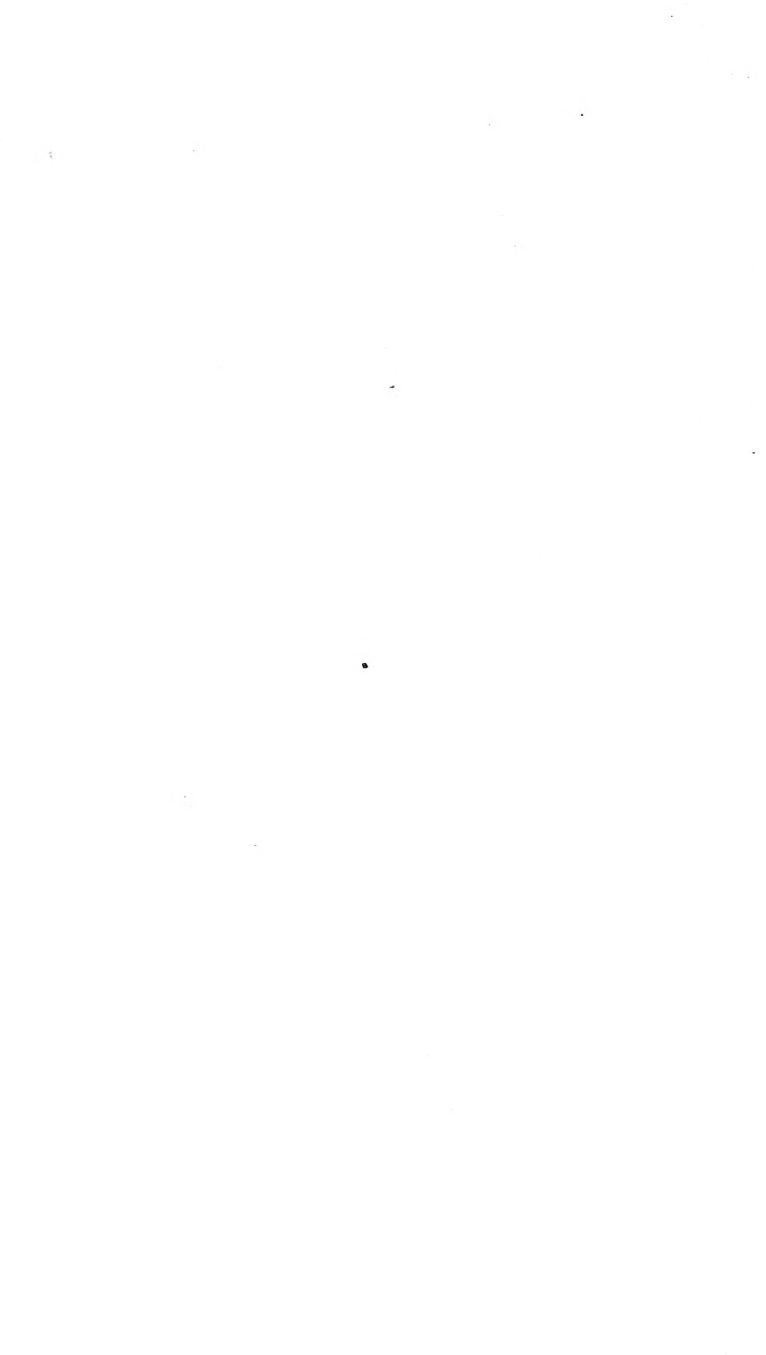
"But I do ask you; and moreover an answer I must have," he persisted.

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" she exclaimed, "I cannot tell you," and overcome by the agony of her feelings she wept aloud.

Mollified on the instant by so painful a demonstration of the excess of her affliction, Mr. Gilbert, who in his unsuccessful endeavours to obtain the explanation he considered it his duty to require, had not only been roused to justifiable displeasure, but had also been betrayed into a complete loss of temper, now, in the reaction of his feelings, bitterly repenting the severity he had manifested, lavished on his beloved daughter the tenderest caresses, and strove only to subdue the agitation he had excited.

His endeavours were presently successful—Emily became comparatively tranquillized, and falling on her father's neck, with tears and broken words expressed her thankfulness for his restored favour.

END OF VOL. II.





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